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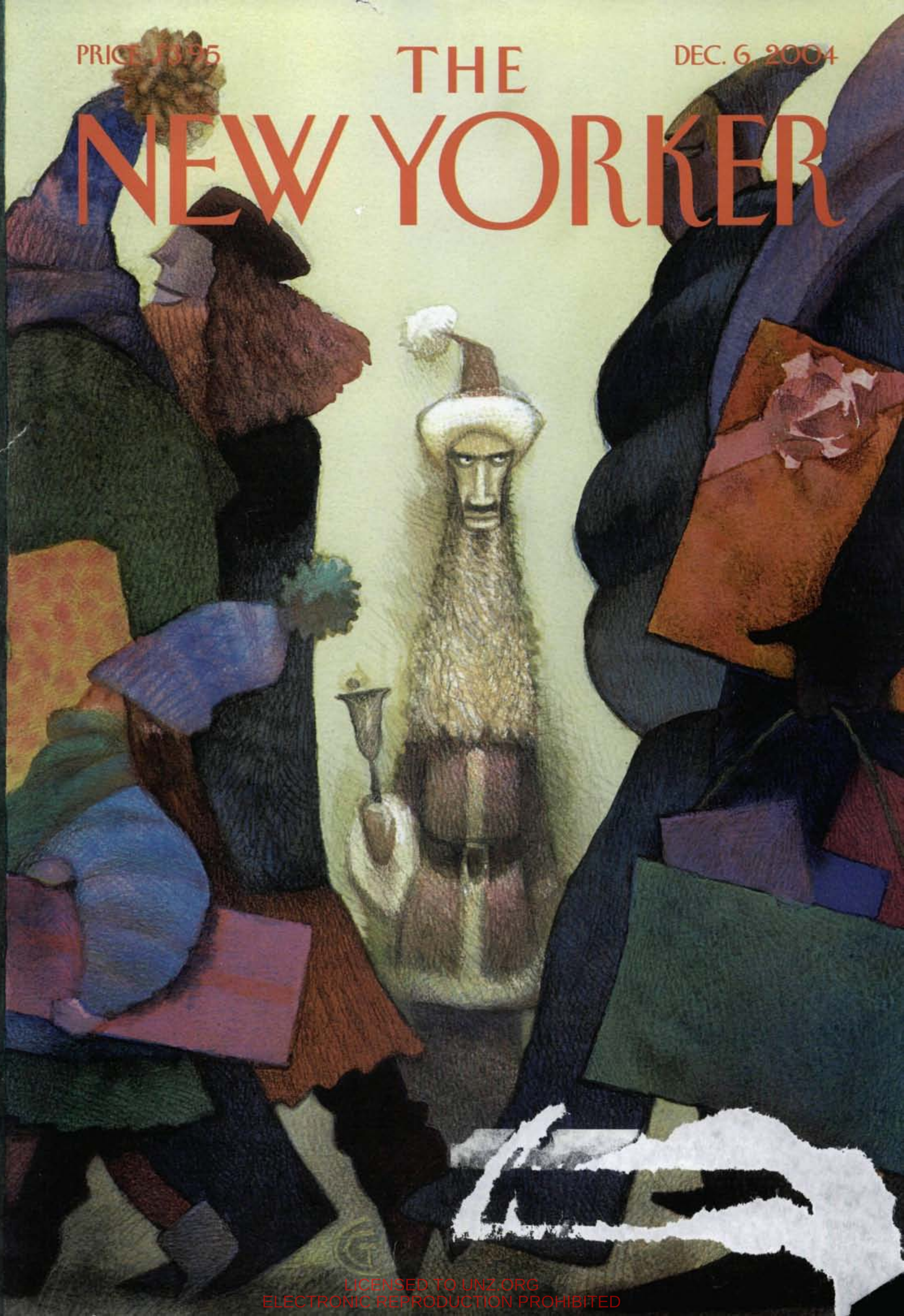
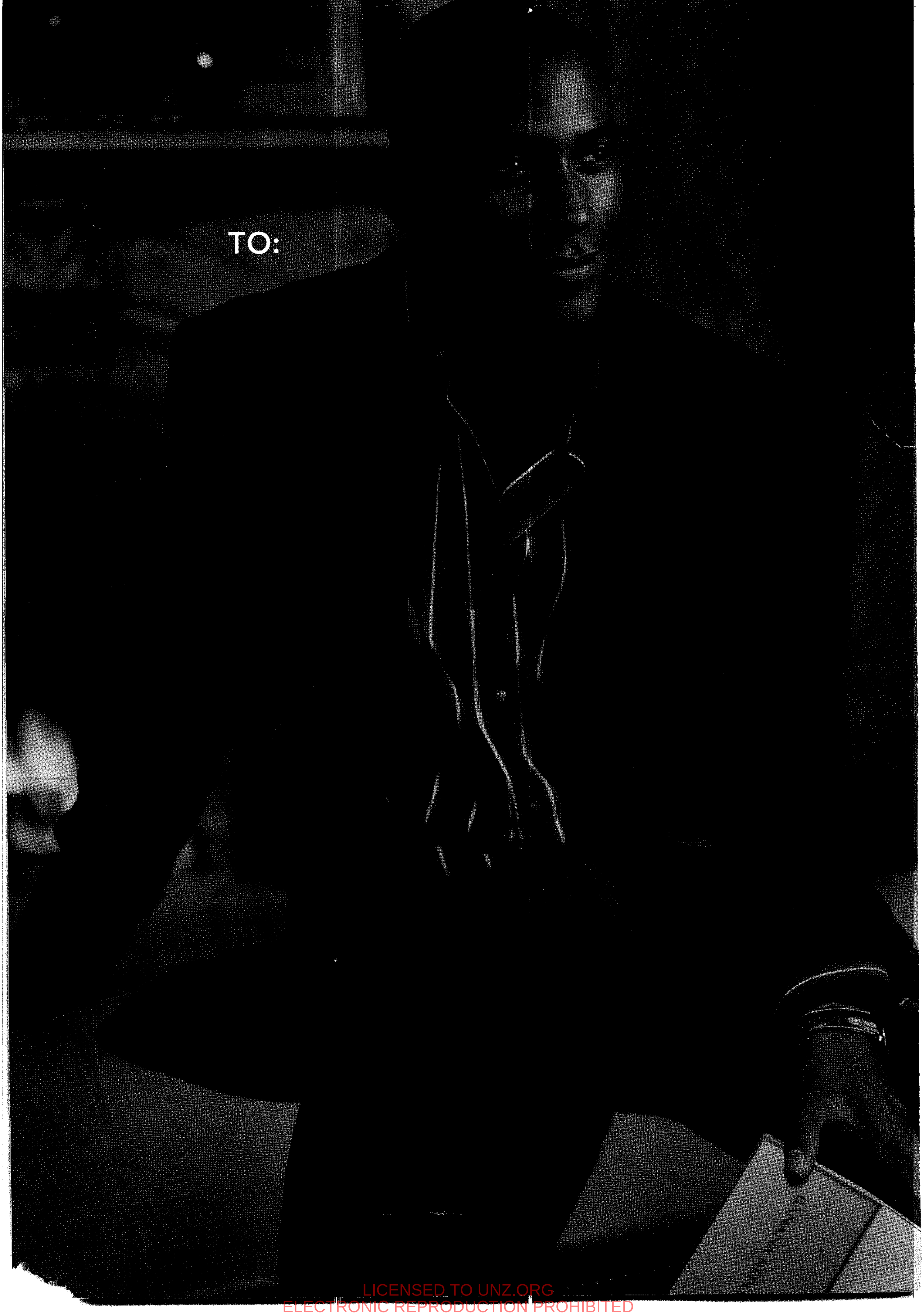
DEC. 6, 2004

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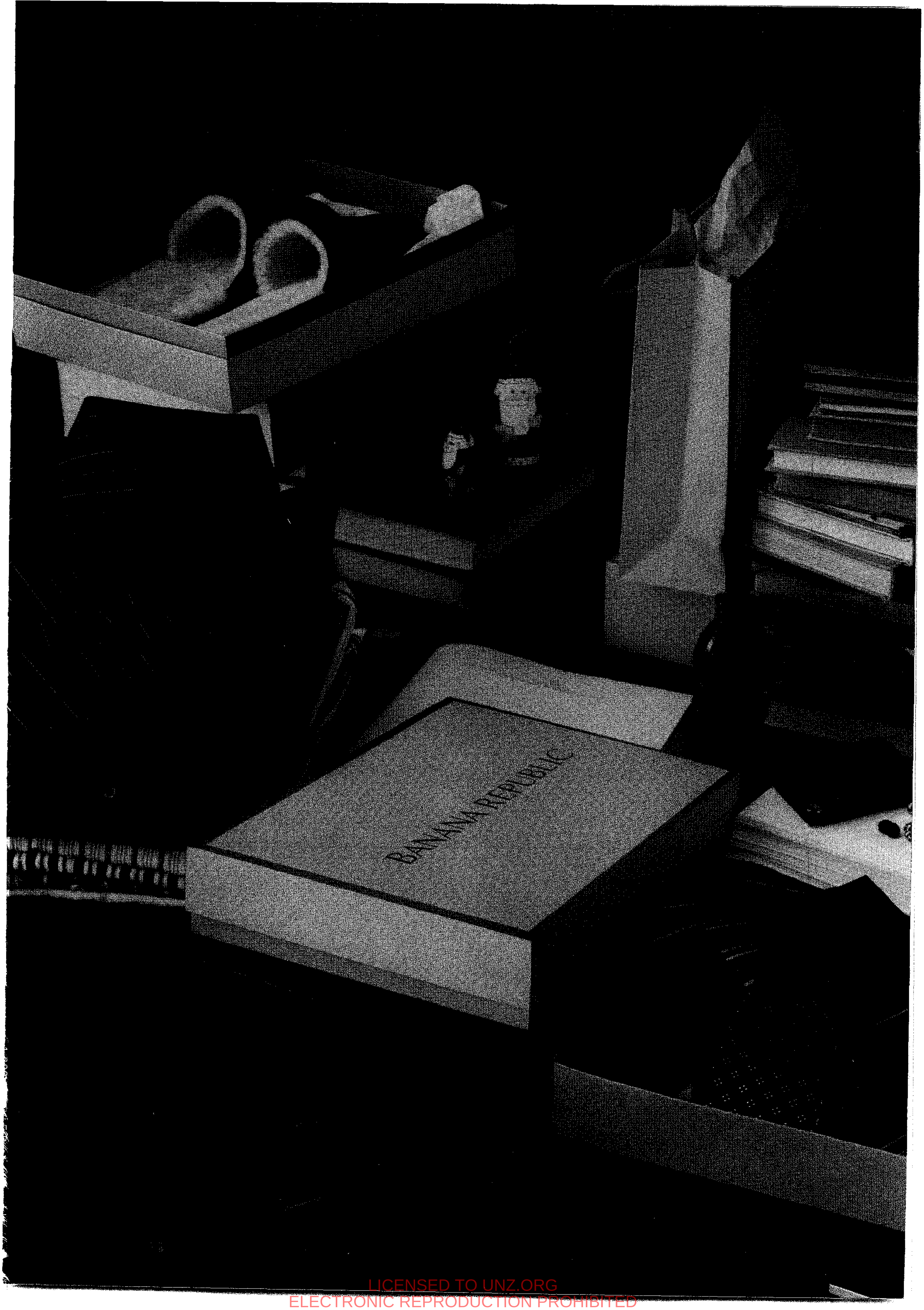
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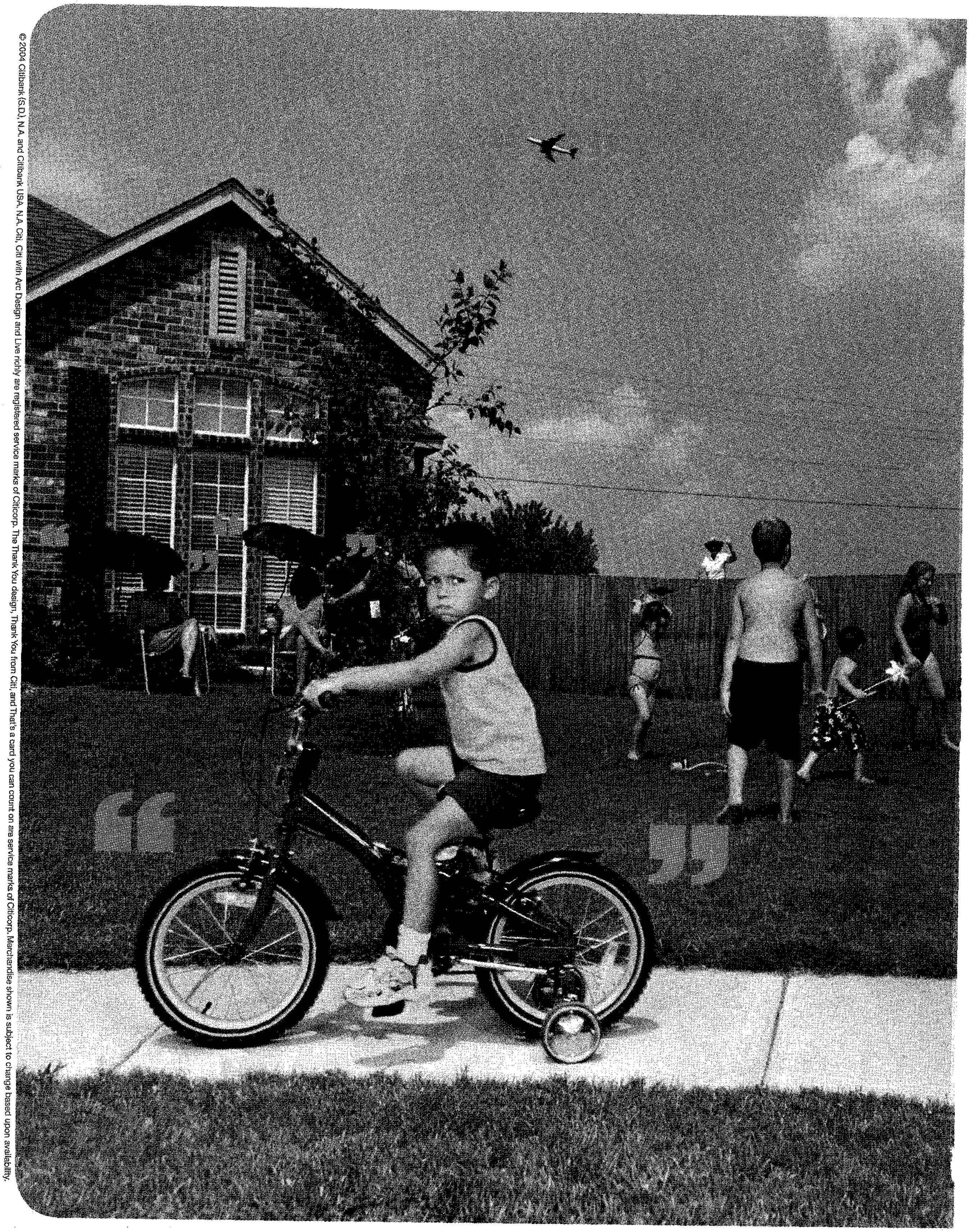

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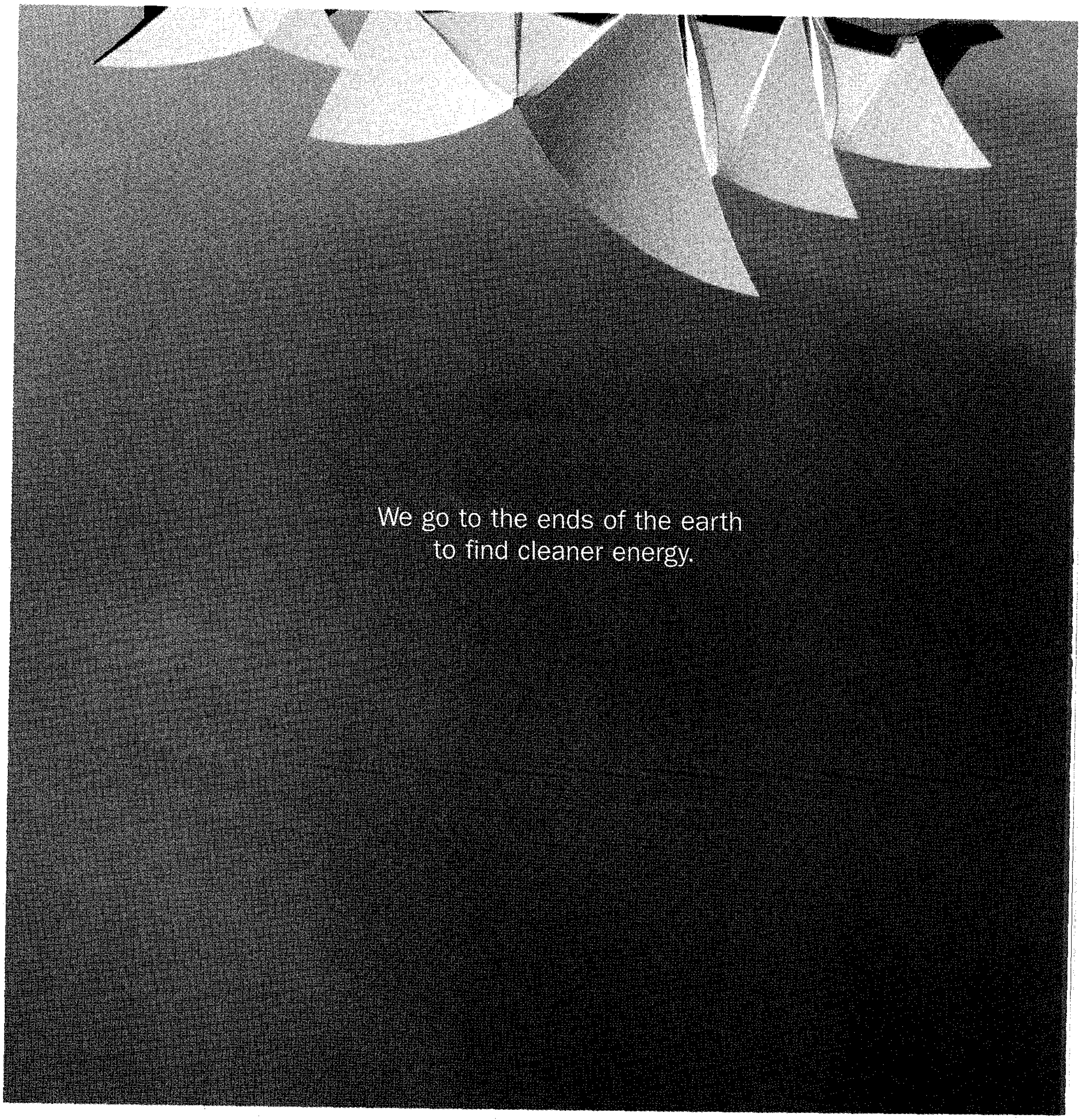
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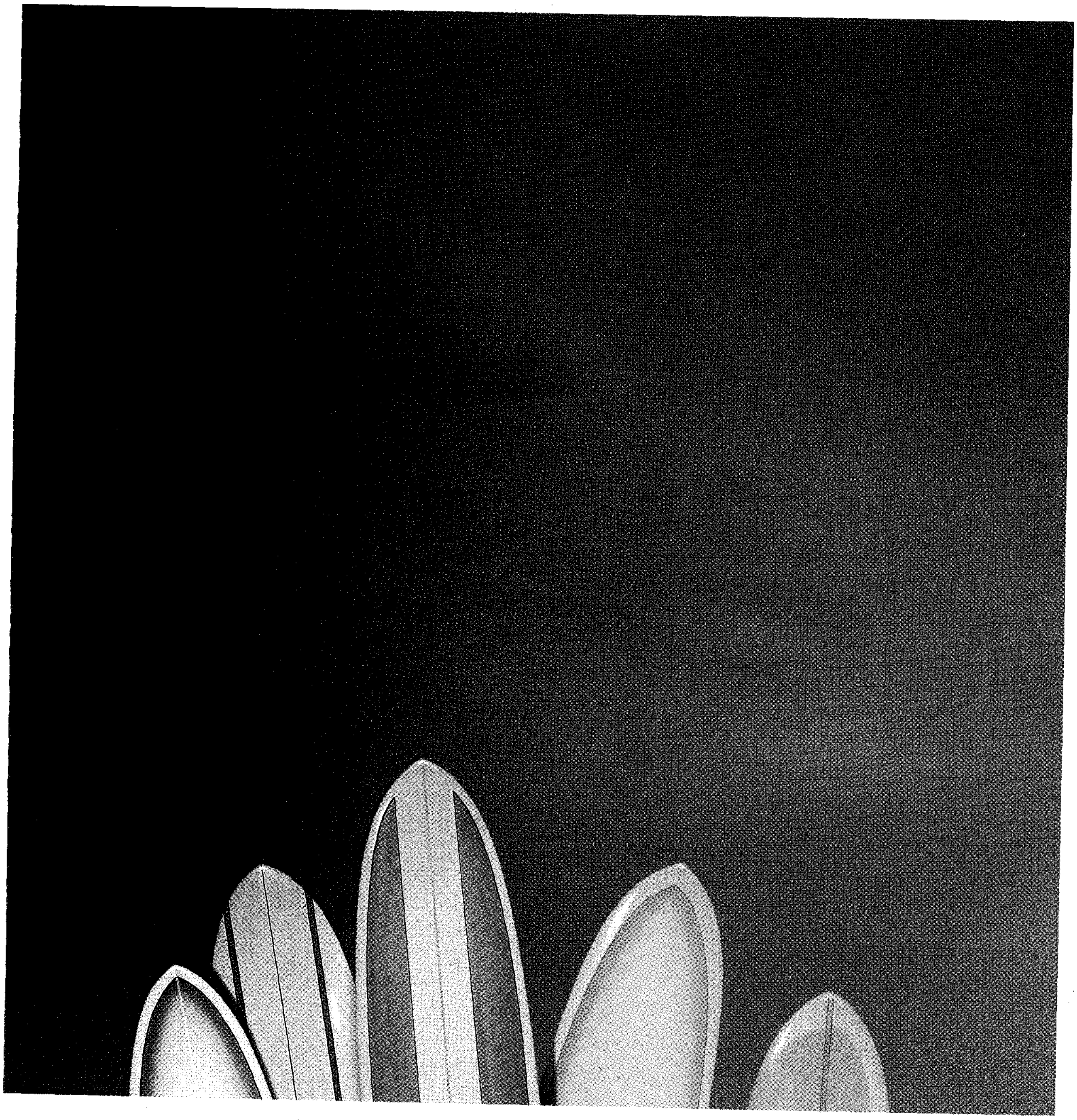

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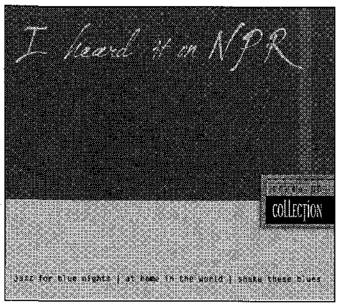
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DECEMBER 6, 2004

14 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN
45 THE TALK OF THE TOWN
Dollar trouble; taking on Dr. Kinsey.

Louis Menand 54 POSTCARD FROM STANFORD
Permanent Fatal Errors
How voters really chose their candidate.

George Saunders 62 SHOUTS & MURMURS
Flooding the Zone

Caitlin Flanagan 64 DOMESTIC LIFE
What Teachers Want
Has classroom gift-giving gone too far?

Burkhard Bilger 70 A REPORTER AT LARGE
God Doesn't Need Ole Anthony
The man who scares televangelists.

Atul Gawande 82 ANNALS OF MEDICINE
The Bell Curve
Should patients settle for an average doctor?

Andrew O'Hagan 92 FICTION
"Foreigners"

THE CRITICS
BOOKS
Adam Gopnik 102 *A biography of Django Reinhardt.*
109 Briefly Noted
Laura Miller 110 *Lord Dunsany's fantastical writings.*
Peter Schjeldahl 117 THE ART WORLD
A new look at MOMA's collection.
Sasha Frere-Jones 119 POP MUSIC
Eminem's "Encore."
John Lahr 122 THE THEATRE
Dame Edna and Woody Allen.
Anthony Lane 125 THE CURRENT CINEMA
"Alexander."

POEMS
Günter Grass 58 "After Midnight"
Mark Strand 80 "Mirror"
Louise Glück 104 "The Night Migrations"

COVER *"In the Shadow," by Carter Goodrich* THE BACK PAGE *"Top Brokers Spot the Hot New Neighborhoods," by Bruce McCall* DRAWINGS *Frank Cotham, P. C. Vey, Liza Donnelly, Alex Gregory, Mike Twohy, William Haefeli, Gahan Wilson, Barbara Smaller, Roz Chast, Bruce Eric Kaplan, Danny Shanahan, Michael Crawford, Leo Cullum, Matthew Diffee, Lee Lorenz, Jack Ziegler, John O'Brien, Drew Dernavich*

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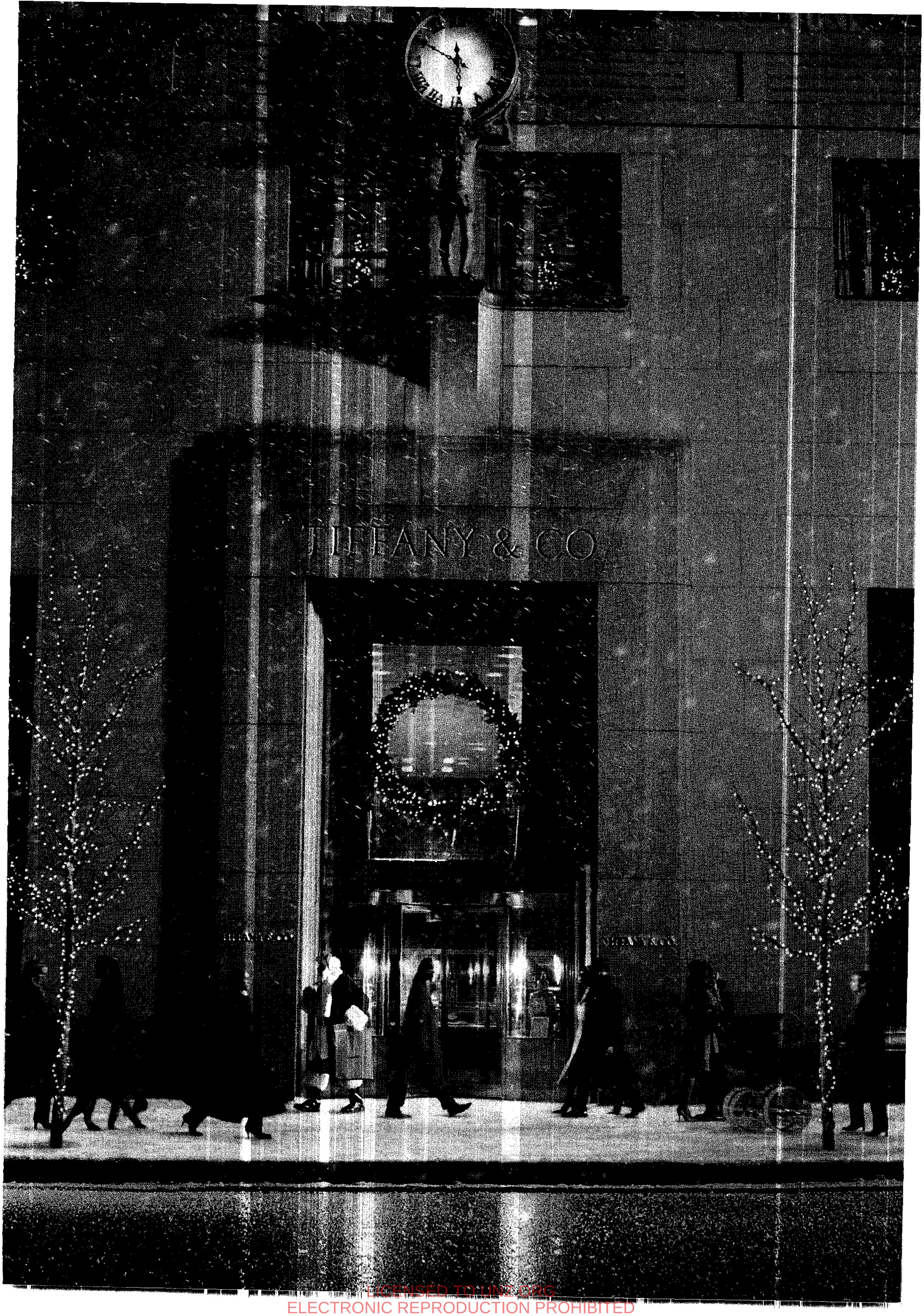
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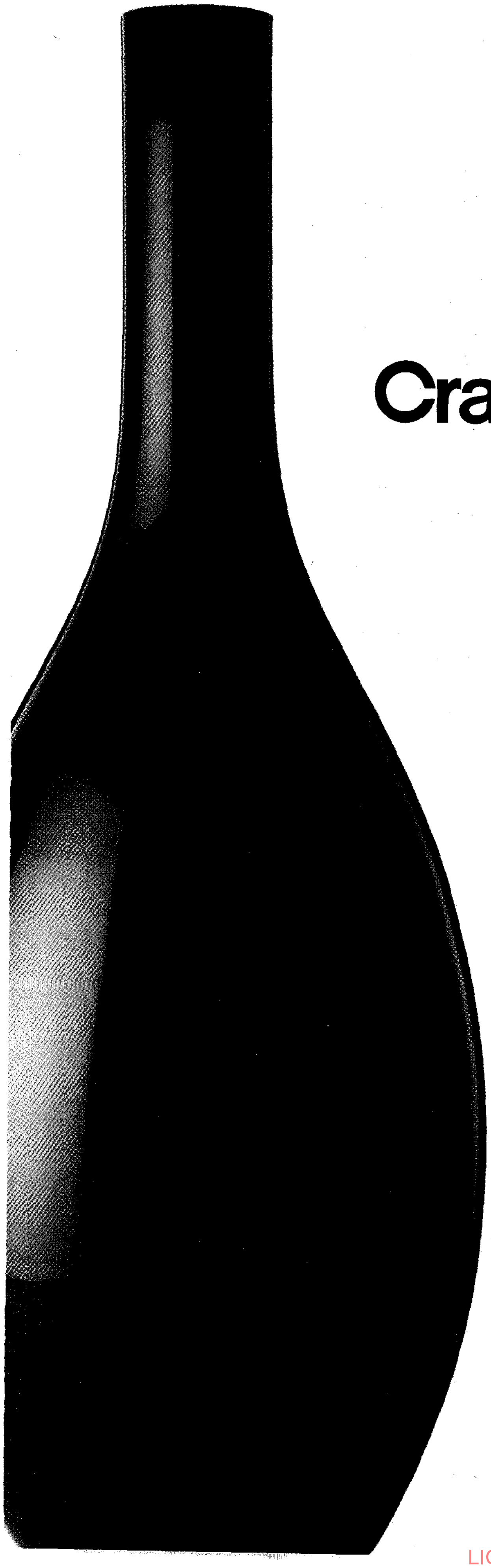

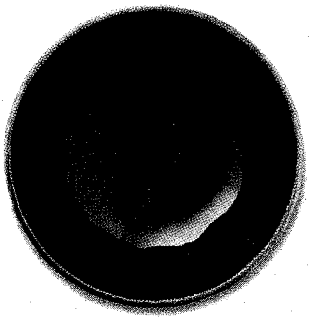

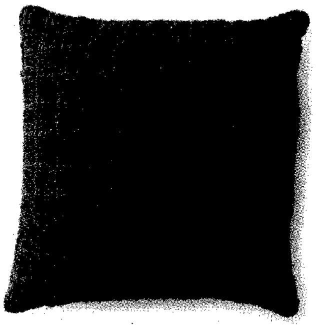

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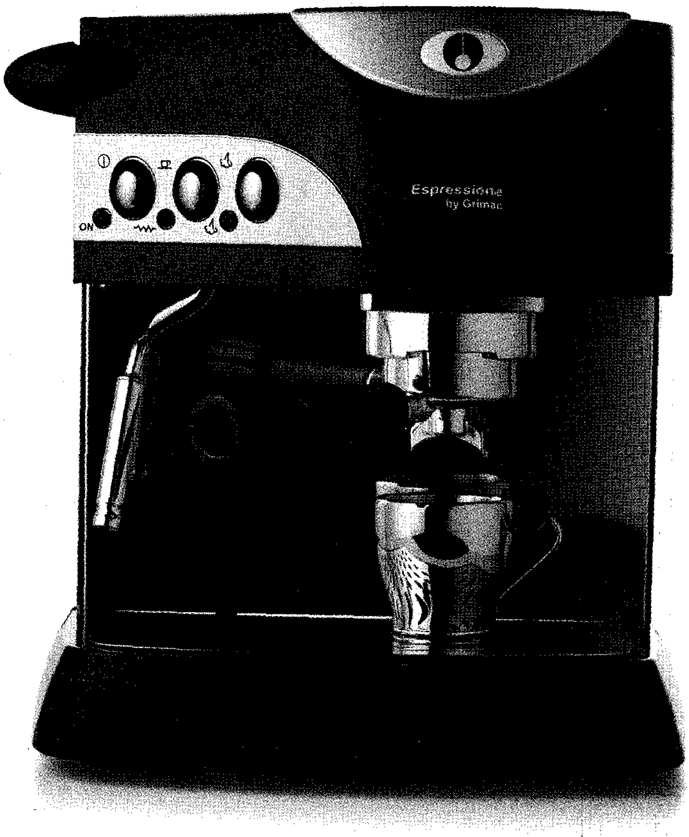
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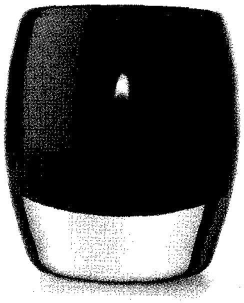
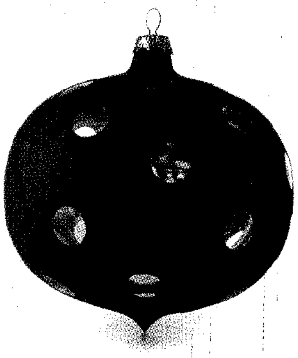
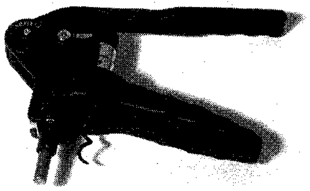




"The Rabbit is my 4th lever corkscrew—and the last one I'll have to buy!"
Bob Jula, Pittsburgh, Pa.



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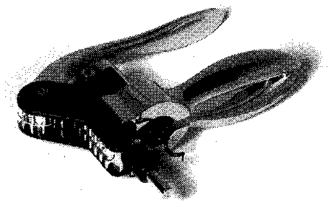

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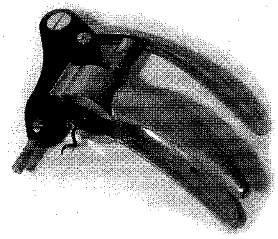

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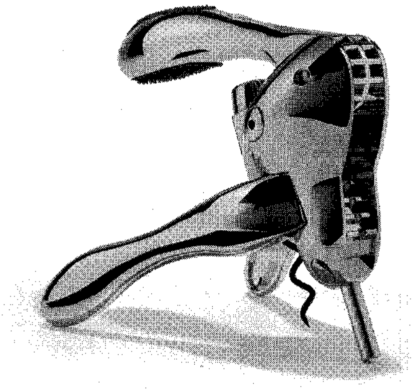

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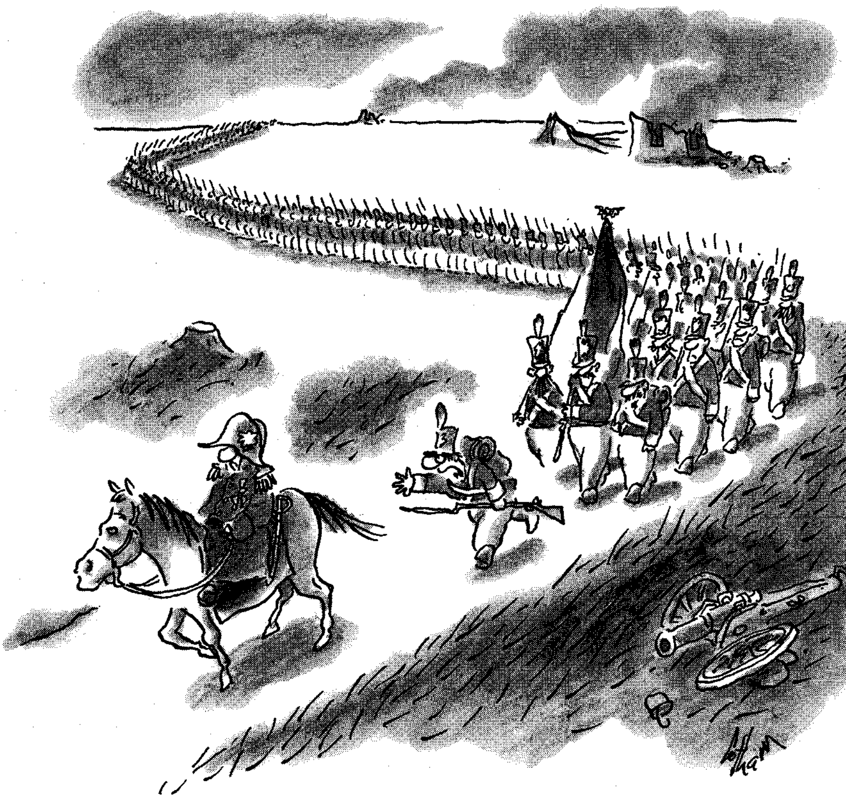
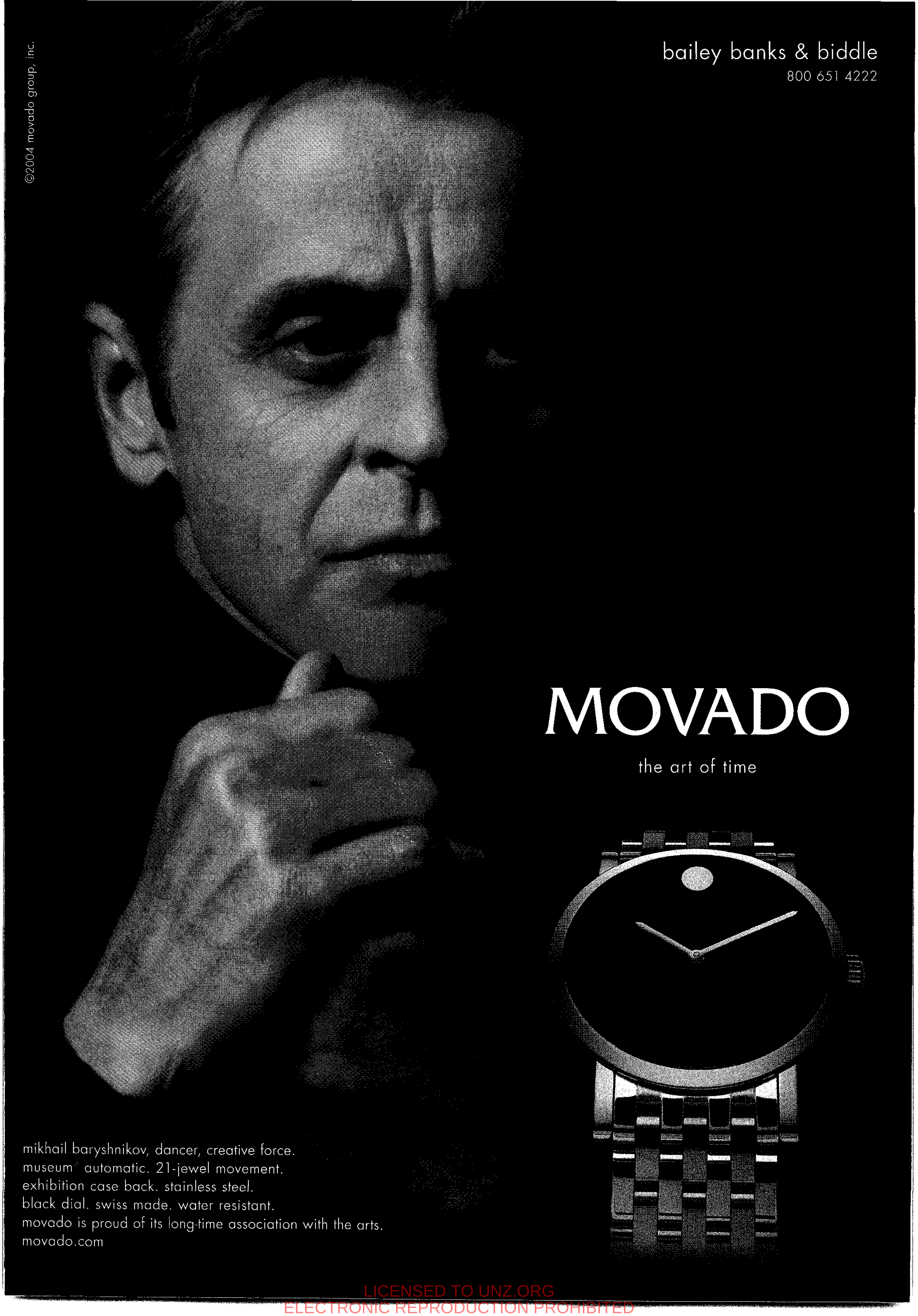
Louise Glück (Poem, p. 104) has written seven books of poetry, including, most recently, "The Seven Ages." ♦



"There are plenty of domestic issues that need to be addressed."



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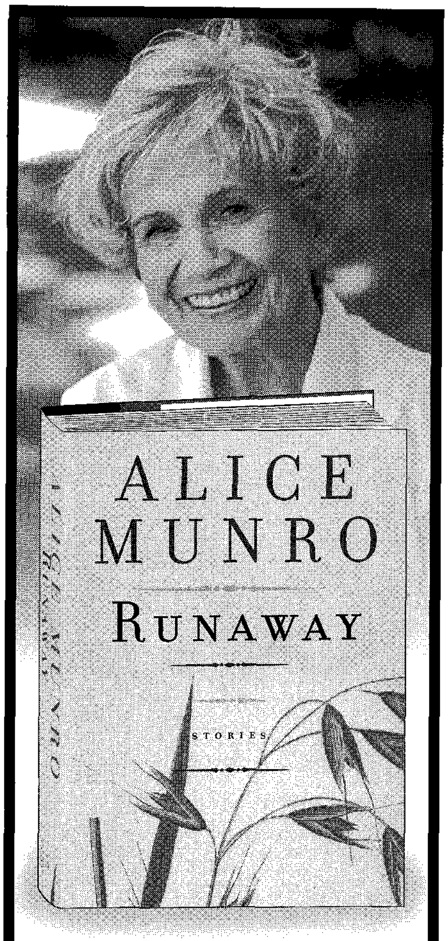

"Alice Munro has a strong claim to being the best fiction writer now working in North America," says JONATHAN FRANZEN on the cover of the *New York Times Book Review.*

"RUNAWAY is a marvel...

Runaway is so good that I don't want to talk about it here. Quotation can't do the book justice, and neither can synopsis. The way to do it justice is to read it... Which leaves me with the simple instruction that I began with:

Read Munro! Read Munro!"

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THE MAIL

THE TRUTH ABOUT TRAUMA

Malcolm Gladwell presents as gospel a flawed meta-analysis by Bruce Rind, Robert Bauserman, and Philip Tromovitch in a 1998 *Psychological Bulletin* article purporting to show that childhood sexual abuse produces little in the way of lasting psychological ill effects ("Getting Over It," November 8th). The meta-analysis went wrong in many ways: the authors studied only college students, who by definition were resilient enough to make it to higher education; they attributed what distress they found to disruptive families rather than to abuse, although the two cannot be neatly disentangled; and they trivialized the unwelcome but still observable connection between abuse and long-term psychological effects. Moreover, even if we take at face value Gladwell's fictional example of resilience from "The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit," in which Tom Rath successfully puts memories of having killed men in the Second World War out of his mind, we are still left with the anomaly of Rath drinking himself into a stupor every night.

David Spiegel
Willson Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences
Stanford University School of Medicine
Stanford, Calif.

As one of the editors at *Psychological Bulletin* who accepted the controversial paper by Rind et al., I was pleased to read Gladwell's article on recovery from psychological trauma. However, I did want to correct one small, but telling, factual detail. Contrary to the statement that "almost immediately" the paper was "denounced by conservative groups and lambasted in the media," there was virtually no public reaction for the better part of a year after its publication. A puzzling aspect of this whole affair is that the majority of the readership of *Psychological Bulletin* apparently found little, if anything, in the article to stir them up. It wasn't until several months later, when Dr. Laura Schlessinger and her many fans picked up on the paper, that it became notorious.

Kenneth J. Sher
Curators' Professor of Psychological Sciences
University of Missouri-Columbia
Columbia, Mo.

Gladwell mentions "a kind of psychological immune system" that helps people maintain emotional balance, but he does not detail the advances in neurobiology of the past twenty years which now inform our understanding of the long-term effects of childhood trauma on cognitive and emotional systems. Among these findings are studies that show narrowing of the corpus callosum (reported in Martin H. Teicher's article "Wounds That Time Won't Heal," in *Cerebrum*) and right-hemisphere defects and compromise of the orbitofrontal cortex (described in Allan N. Schore's book "Affect Dysregulation and Disorders of the Self"). There are also psychological experiments that show the persistence of traumatic memories, and animal studies that show the difficulty of extinguishing a conditioned fear response. Such findings suggest that trauma studies rest on more substantial neurological foundations than Gladwell allows.

Betsy Seifter
Wellesley, Mass.

ANSWERS TO LAST WEEK'S CARTOON ACROSTIC

"A drawing is always dragged down to the level of its caption."

—*James Thurber*

Words:
limits; address; postal; garbage; woodwind; French; juvenile; throat; getaway.

•

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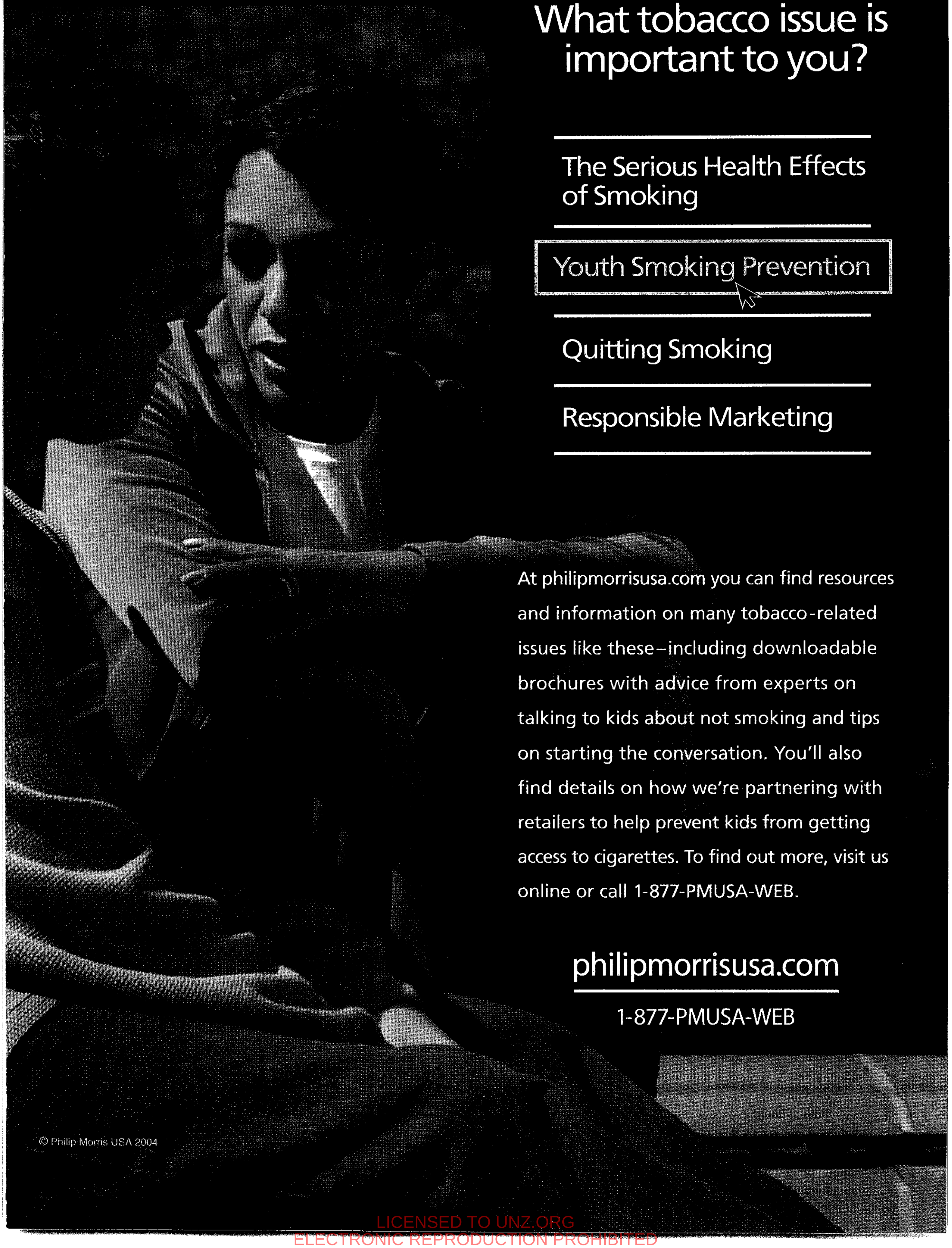

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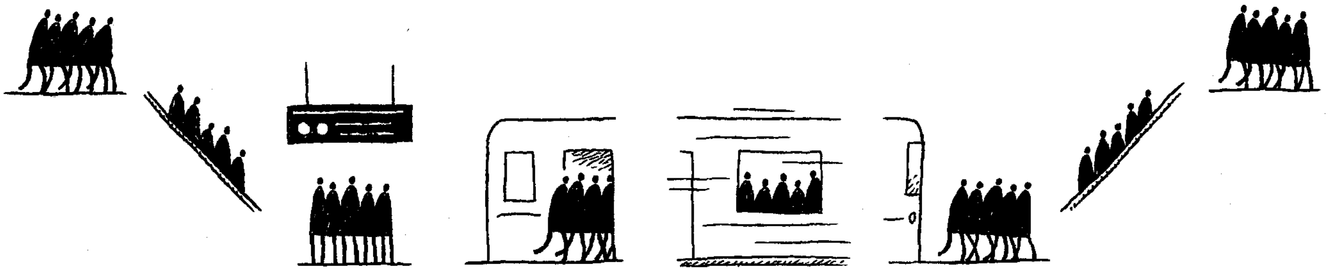

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For expanded events listings, please visit www.newyorker.com/goingson.

THIS WEEK

STILL WALKING

For proof that kitsch is as durable as talent, look no further than Nancy Sinatra, who was an object of curiosity in the sixties (thanks to the atmospheric pop songs she recorded with Lee Hazelwood and others) and is an object of curiosity now (thanks to the new, self-titled album she made with the help of Morrissey, Bono, Thurston Moore, and other admirers). Whether or not it holds up as a piece of music, it will at least introduce the sixty-four-year-old singer to a younger set of fans who may not know "These Boots Are Made for Walkin' "—or, for that matter, any of her father's music. (Joe's Pub, Dec. 1; see Night Life.)

KNIGHT LIFE

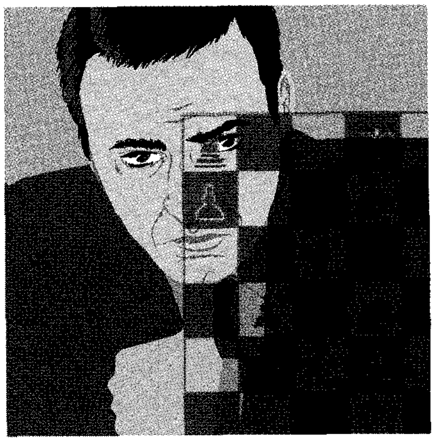
"Game Over: Kasparov and the Machine" is a nimble documentary that examines whether I.B.M. and its programmers cheated when its Deep Blue chess supercomputer defeated the Russian grand master Garry Kasparov, in 1997. The inquiry is motivated by more than simple conspiracy theory. There is a history of chess machines being manipulated by humans, and I.B.M. had incentive to boost Deep Blue: the company's value increased by $2 billion after Kasparov withdrew. Kasparov, who was demoralized by the defeat, returns to the site of the match for the first time. The computer is not interviewed. (Cinema Village, opens Dec. 3; see Movies.)

CROSSING OVER

Last month, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre moved into a new home on Fifty-fifth Street at Ninth Avenue. This week, the company travels a few blocks east to start another five-week season at City Center. The première "Love Stories," which is divided into three sections and set to the music of Stevie Wonder, splices together fragments of Ailey repertory with dance traditions past, present, and future. It is choreographed by the director, Judith Jamison, the hip-hop master Rennie Harris, and Robert Battle. (Opens Dec. 1 at 7; see Dance.)

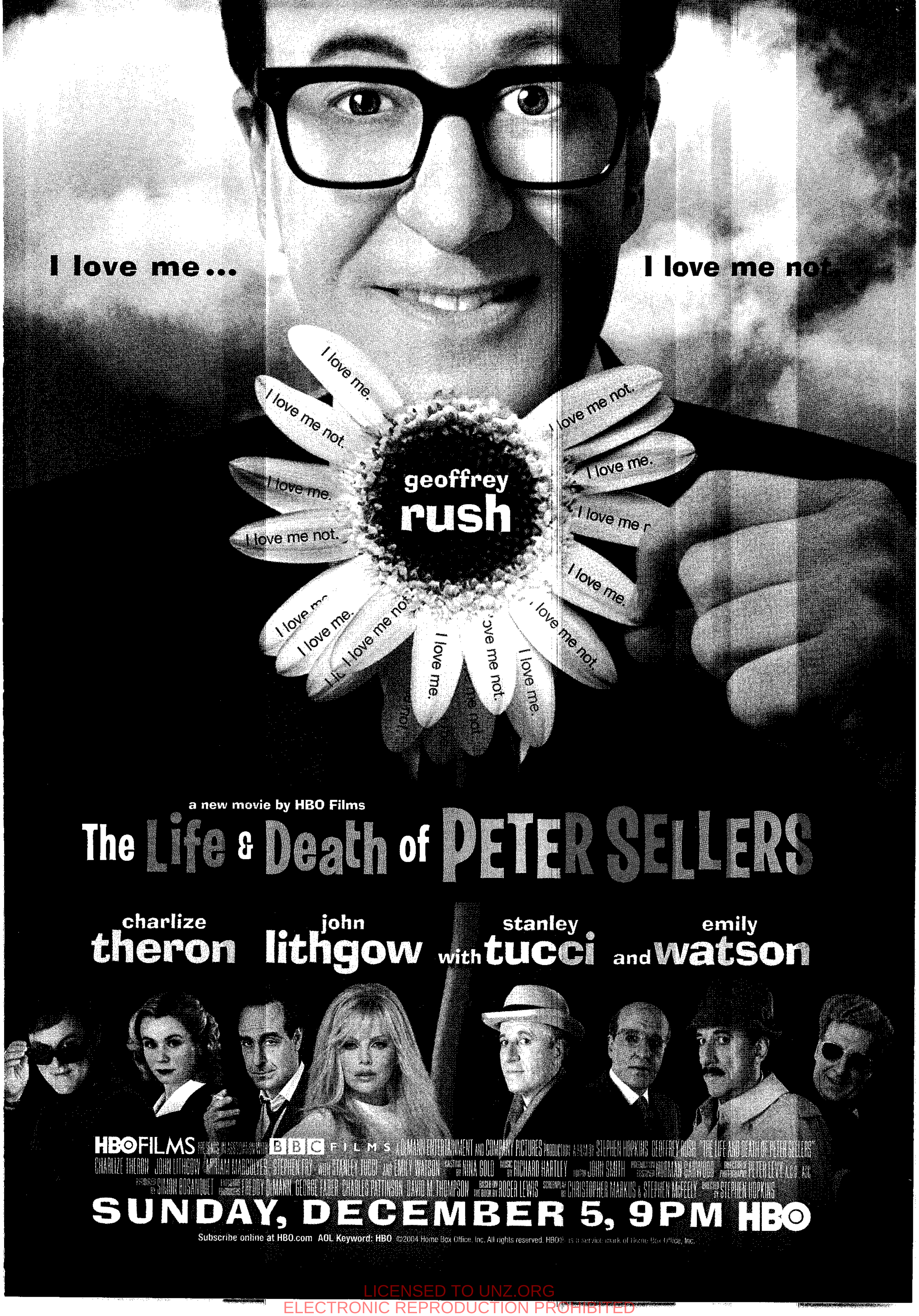
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre performs "Love Stories" at City Center.

Nancy Sinatra presents new songs and old favorites at Joe's Pub.



JOSÉ LUIS MERINO

Computer-chess intrigue in "Game Over: Kasparov and the Machine."


I love me…
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The Life & Death of PETER SELLERS

charlize theron john lithgow with stanley tucci and emily watson

HBO FILMS presents in association with BBC FILMS a DeMANN ENTERTAINMENT and COMPANY PICTURES production a film by STEPHEN HOPKINS GEOFFREY RUSH "THE LIFE AND DEATH OF PETER SELLERS" CHARLIZE THERON JOHN LITHGOW MIRIAM MARGOLYES STEPHEN FRY with STANLEY TUCCI and EMILY WATSON casting by NINA GOLD music by RICHARD HARTLEY editor JOHN SMITH production designer NORMAN GARWOOD director of photography PETER LEVY A.C.S., A.S.C. produced by SIMON BOSANQUET executive producers FREDDY DeMANN, GEORGE FABER, CHARLES PATTINSON, DAVID M. THOMPSON based on the book by ROGER LEWIS screenplay by CHRISTOPHER MARKUS & STEPHEN McFEELY directed by STEPHEN HOPKINS

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HOLIDAY EVENTS

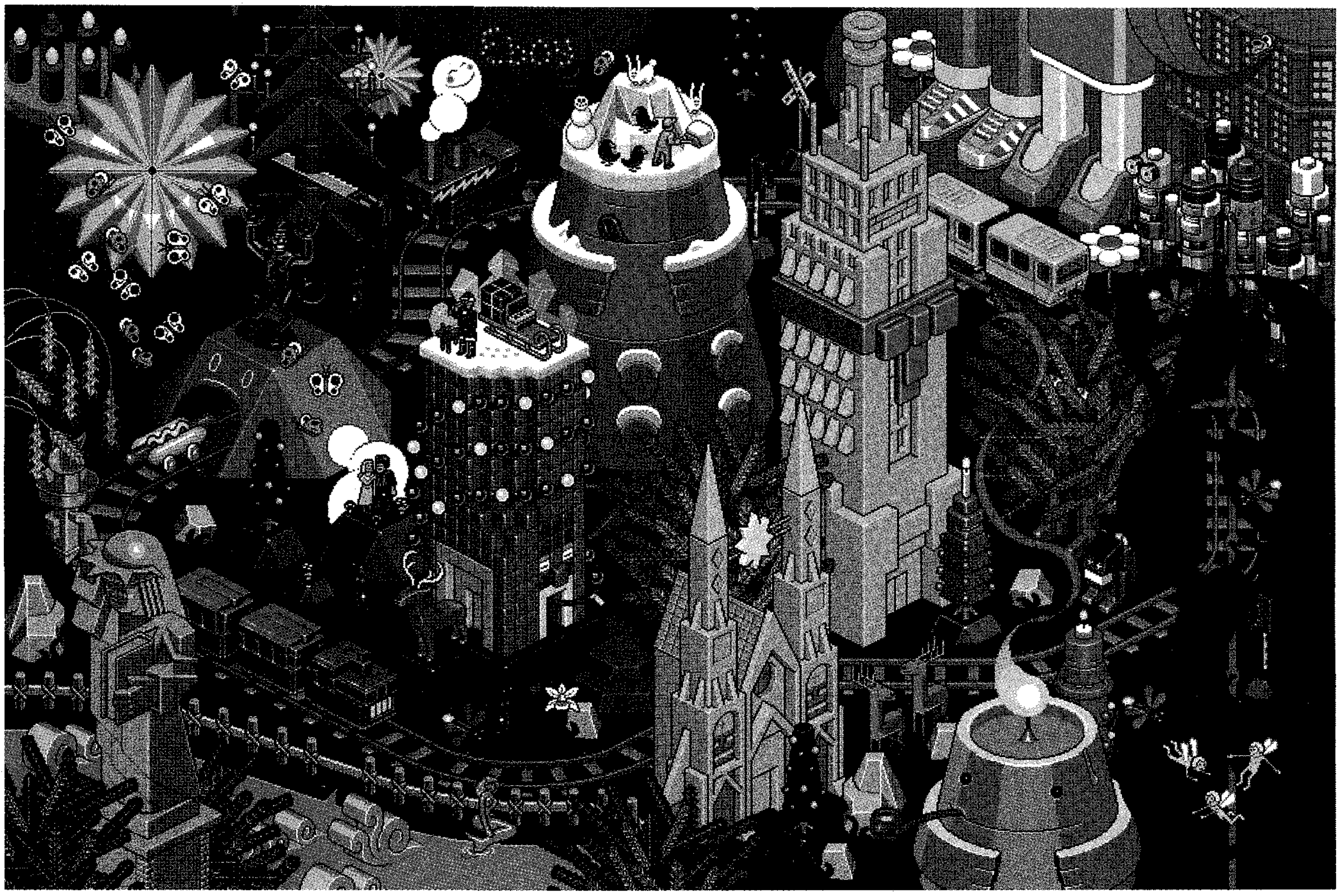
"THE RADIO CITY CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR"
The high-kicking Rockettes, accompanied by Santa, elves, and live donkeys and camels, bring the joys of the season from the North Pole to Manhattan. Directed and choreographed by John Dietrich. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 212-247-4777. Through Jan. 2.)

"SANTA MEETS THE ICE DRAGON: A SYMPHONIC CHRISTMAS TALE"
Bob McGrath, who plays Bob on "Sesame Street," stars in a new musical about a little boy and an elf who help Santa save Christmas from the evil Ice Dragon. The original score, by Erik Van der Wurff, is performed live by the American Symphony Orchestra. Directed by Anne Geenen. (Beacon, Broadway at 74th St. 212-220-0508. Dec. 10-28.)

"THE CHRISTMAS REVELS"
The New York Revels' twenty-fifth annual celebration of the winter solstice has a Scottish theme this year, with Highland dancing, fiddling, piping, songs, stories, Burns recitations, and performances by the Galoshins Guisers mummers. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Dec. 10 at 8, Dec. 11 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 12 at 2 and 6.)

"AH, MY DEAR ANDERSEN"
Urban Stages' holiday production presents four Hans Christian Andersen fairy tales ("The Nightingale," "The Ugly Duckling," "The Fir Tree," and "Sweethearts"), enlivened with original music and embellished with fanciful costumes. Directed by Aleksey Burago. (259 W. 30th St. 212-868-4444. Dec. 4-Jan. 9.)

"A CHRISTMAS CAROL"
Barry Williams (a.k.a. Greg Brady from "The Brady Bunch") leads the cast in this staging of the Dickens classic. (Beacon, Broadway at 74th St. 212-307-4100. Through Dec. 5.)



The New York Botanical Garden's holiday train show features replicas of the Empire State Building and other local landmarks.

EBOY

"ROBIN HOOD"
A new musical by Manhattan Children's Theatre. With book and lyrics by Mark Sarto and musical arrangements by Chris Alonzo. Directed by Laura Stevens. (380 Broadway, at White St. 212-352-3101. Through Dec. 19.)

HOLIDAY TRAIN SHOW
During the stretch from Thanksgiving to the New Year, the city can start to feel mighty crowded and unmanageable. The New York Botanical Garden has reduced the metropolis to a size that anyone can handle—about waist high. Its display in the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory features notable, and often overrun, New York landmarks like the Empire State Building, Radio City Music Hall, and Saint Patrick's Cathedral, all of which are made of plants and connected by rail. (Bronx Park. 718-817-8700. Through Jan. 9.)

WINTER SOLSTICE
The Age of Aquarius may or may not have dawned, but Paul Winter's secular celebration is in its twenty-fifth year. The Irish Uilleann-pipes player Davy Spillane, the African-American Forces of Nature Dance Theatre Ensemble, the Russian singers of the Dmitri Pokrovsky group, and the globe-trotting percussionist Glen Velez promise a transcendent multicultural experience. (Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 212-662-2133. Dec. 16-17 at 7:30 and Dec. 18 at 2 and 7:30.)

"THE NUTCRACKER"
The New York City Ballet offers performances of Balanchine's fantasy through the New Year (for more information, see Dance). ♦ "The Yorkville Nutcracker," a local version choreographed by Francis Patrelle and set in 1895 in Gracie Mansion, Central Park, and other city locations, plays at Hunter College's Kaye Playhouse and features guest artists from the city's top ballet companies. (Park Ave. at 68th St. 212-772-4448. Dec. 9 at 7, Dec. 10 at 6, Dec. 11 at 2 and 7, and Dec. 12 at 1 and 6.) ♦ The New York Theatre Ballet's short, child-friendly "Nutcracker" has twenty-one performances through Dec. 28. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-307-4100.)

HOLIDAY MARKETS
Festive red-and-white striped tents appear at several spots across the city, offering booth after booth of imported embroidery, candles, ornaments, jewelry, enamelled mirrors, fanciful clocks, and other gifting gear. This year, a new outpost opens on Columbus Circle, at the Merchant's Gate entrance to the Park. (Perhaps one day they'll add gluhwein stalls and put the finishing touch on this European tradition.) Locations: Union Square, through Dec. 24. Open Mondays through Fridays, 11 A.M. to 8, Saturdays, 10 A.M. to 8, and Sundays, 11 A.M. to 7. ♦ Columbus Circle, Dec. 3-24. Open daily, 11 A.M. to 8. ♦ Bryant Park "Fêtes de Noël," through Jan. 2. Open Mondays through Fridays, 11 A.M. to 7, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 A.M. to 8. ♦ Grand Central Station Holiday Fair (Vanderbilt Hall), through Dec. 24. Mondays through Saturdays, 10 A.M. to 8, and Sundays, noon to 6.

HANUKKAH
Dec. 8 at 8: The Israeli-based global-pop singer Noa winds up her U.S. tour with a concert at Congregation Rodeph Shalom. (7 W. 83rd St. For more information, call 212-608-0555.) ♦ Dec. 11 at 8: JDub Records presents "Jewltide II," a night of music and lights with Frank London's Brazilian Bass Allstars, the klezmer-hip-hop group So-Called, the Persian-American genre-bender Haale, and DJ Thundergod, otherwise known as Brian Rosenworcel, from the band Guster. (Southpaw, 125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn. 718-230-0236.) ♦ Dec. 14, from 4 to 8: Ratner's, the ninety-nine-year-old Lower East Side restaurant, is throwing a closing party (its building is scheduled for demolition early next year), which presents one last chance to follow in the footsteps of Jackie Mason, Bill Graham, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and Meyer Lansky. The owners are serving blintzes and other offerings at their 1905 prices, and the multi-instrumentalist Matt Darriau and other musicians will provide the entertainment. (138 Delancey St. For more information, call 212-608-0555.)

MORE HOLIDAY MUSIC

"MESSIAH"
Handel's glorious "entertainment" on sacred themes never lacks for performances come holiday time; here are some of the best. Dec. 14 and Dec. 16 at 7:30: As the country's leading Anglican choir of men and boys, the Saint Thomas Choir has always offered a "Messiah" of impeccable pedigree, sung in New York's most beautiful Episcopal church. John Scott, formerly the choirmaster at St. Paul's Cathedral in London, has replaced the venerable Gerre Hancock, who has retired after thirty-three distinguished years. The early-music band Concert Royal is still on hand, however, and they will be joined by the soprano Amanda Balestrieri, the countertenor Thomas Dinan, the tenor Scott Cameron, and the bass Christopher Trueblood. (St. Thomas Church, Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. 212-664-9360.) ♦ Dec. 11 at 2 and 8 and Dec. 23 at 8: The Masterwork Chorus, one of a number of excellent amateur groups that offer "Messiah" to the public every Christmas, celebrates its fiftieth season with a slate of performances (with a professional orchestra) conducted by Andrew Megill. Sally Wolf and Nathan Davis are among the vocal soloists. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800.) ♦ Dec. 15-16 at 7:30 and Dec. 17-18 at 8: The New York Philharmonic, which unexpectedly entered the "Messiah" stakes two years ago, will offer an impressive version under Alan Gilbert, a young American conductor who will enjoy a close relationship with the orchestra in the coming seasons. The vocal soloists, all superb, include the mezzo-soprano Nancy Maultsby and the bass-baritone Jonathan Lemalu, joined by the Westminster Choir. (Riverside Church, Riverside Dr. at 120th St. 212-875-5656.)

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
The orchestra also presents a variety of holiday fare at Avery Fisher Hall. Dec. 5 at 3: "Klezmerfest," an energetic afternoon with the Klezmer Conservatory Band. ♦ Dec. 12 at 3: "Holiday Brass," a joyful program offered by the Phil's Principal Brass Quintet and the Canadian Brass. ♦ Dec. 31 at 8: New Year's Eve belongs to Kurt Masur, the orchestra's music director emeritus, who leads the ensemble (and the New York Choral Artists) in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The vocal soloists in the "Ode to Joy" include the soprano Adrianne Pieczonka and the bass-baritone Albert Dohmen, both making their Philharmonic débuts. (212-875-5656.)

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Hearing a concert in the historic intimacy of the Medieval Sculpture Hall is an essential New York experience; each program here is given twice, at 6:30 and 8:30. Dec. 5: The ringing tones of Chanticleer, the incomparable all-male chamber choir, return to the museum in a concert of carols, medieval and Renaissance sacred works, and spirituals. ♦ Dec. 12: Quartetto Gelato, the Canadian vocal-and-instrumental ensemble (the violinist Peter DeSotto doubles as an operatic tenor), performs an all-ages program of songs and carols along with music by Menotti and Corelli. ♦ Dec. 13: The Aulos Ensemble, one of the city's most distinguished early-music groups, offers "A Baroque Christmas," a concert mixing authentic versions of carols from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries along with music by Bach, Couperin, and Rameau. (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949.)

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

AGA-BOOM
Gleeful, inventively messy mayhem from some of the world's most expert clowns and contortionists, directed by the Cirque du Soleil veteran Dimitri Bogatirev. Opens Dec. 3 at 7. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

THE BALTIMORE WALTZ
Mark Brokaw directs the Signature Theatre Company's revival of Paula Vogel's Obie-winning 1992 play about a woman who squeezes as much joy as possible from life after she is stricken with a disease. In previews. Opens Dec. 5 at 7:30. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

LA CAGE AUX FOLLES
A revival of Jerry Herman and Harvey Fierstein's musical about a gay couple who disguise themselves as husband and wife. Gary Beach and Daniel Davis lead the cast. Directed by Jerry Zaks. In previews. (Marquis, Broadway at 46th St. 212-307-4100.)

THE CHAIRS
David Gordon's dance-theatre works have frequently featured metal folding chairs. They've also made repeated theatrical use of his forty-year marriage to Valda Setterfield. In Gordon's new staging of Ionesco's absurdist classic, he combines those preoccupations, casting himself and his wife as the ornery old couple who set out dozens of chairs for imaginary guests. With a fresh translation by Michael Feingold and a Michael Gordon score. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. Dec. 1-4 at 7:30.)

FAT PIG
A man tries to muster the courage to date an overweight woman, in a new play by Neil LaBute that stars Jeremy Piven, Ashlie Atkinson, Keri Russell, and Andrew McCarthy. Directed by Jo Bonney. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

GEM OF THE OCEAN
Phylicia Rashad stars in the New York première of the ninth play in August Wilson's ten-play chronicle of the African-American experience. Directed by Kenny Leon. In previews. Opens Dec. 6 at 7. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

MODERN ORTHODOX
Jason Biggs, Molly Ringwald, Craig Bierko, and Jenn Harris star in a new comedy by Daniel Goldfarb about faith, love, and the diamond district. Directed by James Lapine. In previews. Opens Dec. 6 at 7. (Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

A NUMBER
Sam Shepard—in his first stage appearance in thirty years—stars in Caryl Churchill's new play about the moral repercussions of human cloning. In previews. Opens Dec. 7 at 8. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

PACIFIC OVERTURES
B. D. Wong stars in the Roundabout's revival of the 1976 Sondheim musical (book by John Weidman) about the impact that American culture has had on Japanese society since Commodore Perry landed in Japan in 1853. Directed by Amon Miyamoto. In previews. Opens Dec. 2 at 7. (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

THE RIVALS
Mark Lamos directs a revival of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's comedy of manners, starring Brian Murray, Emily Bergl, Richard Easton, Matt Letscher, and Dana Ivey, as Mrs. Malaprop. In previews. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

RODNEY'S WIFE
Playwrights Horizons presents a new play, set in 1962, in which an aging film star and his wife have a relationship breakdown in Rome. With David Strathairn, as Rodney, Maryann Plunkett, as his wife, and Haviland Morris, as his meddling sister. Written and directed by Richard Nelson. Opens Dec. 1 at 7. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

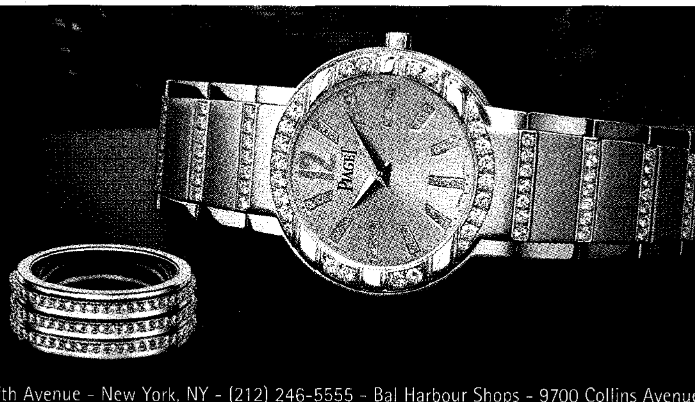
700 SUNDAYS
Billy Crystal makes his Broadway début in a play about his life. Written by Crystal, with additional material by Alan Zweibel. Directed by Des McAnuff. In previews. Opens Dec. 5 at 6. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

SOUVENIR
A new play by Stephen Temperley, about the eccentric socialite Florence Foster Jenkins, who gave terrible recitals at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel and Carnegie Hall in the nineteen-forties. Judy Kaye plays the benighted songstress. Directed by Vivian Matalon and conducted by Jack Lee. Opens Dec. 1 at 8. (York Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 212-868-4444.)

OPENED RECENTLY

DAME EDNA: BACK WITH A VENGEANCE!
The vivacious and vicious Australian housewife and talk-show host (a.k.a. Barry Humphries) presents a new show that includes psychic readings of audience members. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

DAVE GORMAN'S GOOGLEWHACK! ADVENTURE
This likable, self-deprecating British motormouth gives a very good show. It's a shaggy-dog story of an unusual kind. Gorman spent two years crisscrossing the globe (from England to France, America, Australia, China, and back), tracking down the authors



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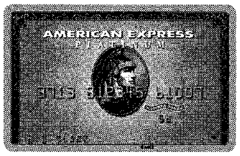

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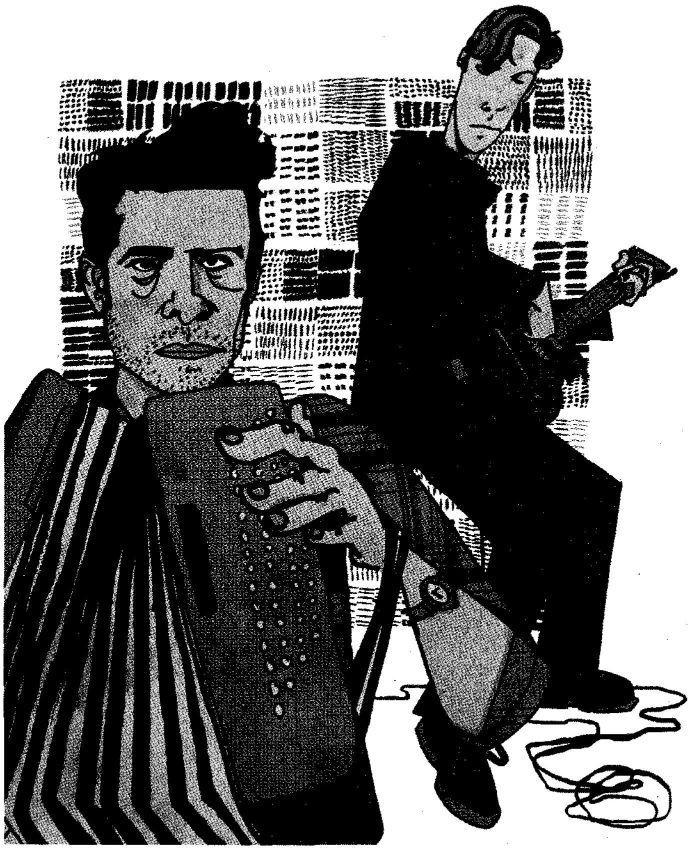
of Googlewhacks—Internet oddities in which two strange words, when combined in a search query, produce only one hit. For instance, when Gorman put in the search terms "dork turnspit," he found a Web site belonging to a man who collects photos of women with their pet dogs. (Village Theatre, 158 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.)

DEMOCRACY
A strong production of Michael Frayn's play about the popular German Chancellor Willy Brandt (James Naughton) and the East German mole Günter Guillaume (Richard Thomas), who served him and eventually sank him. Watching the all-male, business-suited cast animate a raft of names that only Cold War historians know anymore—Horst Ehmke, Herbert Wehner, Arno Kretschmann—gives peculiar satisfaction. It's as if the gray pages of *Wer Ist Wer*—the German *Who's Who*—were to come to life before your eyes in unsuspected color and vibrancy. Directed by Michael Blakemore. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

DOUBT
In a new play by John Patrick Shanley, set in the nineteen-sixties at a Catholic school in the Bronx, a nun (Cherry Jones) worries that a priest (Brían F. O'Byrne) is too close to a male student. Directed by Doug Hughes. (Manhattan Theatre Club at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

EVE-OLUTION
A play by Hilary Illick and Jennifer Krier (based on their experiences) interweaves the stories of two women who are struggling to retain their sense of self while raising a family. This show knows its audience; it has no surprises, but plenty of heart. Directed by Carolyn Cantor. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 212-239-6200.)

THE FOREIGNER
Larry Shue's chestnut about a shy Brit named Charlie who spends three days in a hillbilly hideaway is given delirious life by the physical clowning of Matthew Broderick (as Charlie), by Byron Jennings, as his chum "Froggy" LeSueur (in kneesocks and khaki shorts), and especially by Kevin Cahoon, as a half-wit named Ellard, whose goggle-eyed loopiness gives Don Knotts a run for his money. Directed by Scott Schwartz. (Roundabout at Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)



John Convertino and Joey Burns bring their spooky rock band Calexico to the Bowery Ballroom (see Night Life).

JASHAR AWAN

THE GOD OF HELL
In this apocalyptic cartoon, Sam Shepard transforms his rage at the nation's fear-induced turn to the right into a vision of spiritual contamination. The play begins with the faux-naturalism of a farmhouse in which a farmer, Frank (Randy Quaid), is oiling his boots, and his wife, Emma (J. Smith-Cameron), is watering her plants, but the style and content of the story turn by degrees into the grotesque. Shepard doesn't have the structural prowess to turn his situation into genuine farce, but he manages a confident and unsettling scenario of surreal doom. Lou Jacob directs. (11/29/04) (Actors Studio Drama School Theatre, 151 Bank St. 212-279-4200.)

MARRIAGE
The Pearl Theatre Company presents Gogol's rarely performed 1833 comedy about a charming young woman who is wooed by four vain, craven suitors. Directed by Jesse Berger. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

9 PARTS OF DESIRE
Heather Raffo's remarkable one-woman show, which bears witness to Iraqi women's political oppression, is an example of how art can remake the world and eloquently name pain. Based on research and dozens of interviews conducted on four continents over eleven years (Raffo portrays nine women in the course of the evening), the play brings news of the psychic life of the brutalized and allows us to think about the unthinkable. Directed by Joanna Settle. (11/8/04) (Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 212-239-6200.)

A SECOND HAND MEMORY
A new play written and directed by Woody Allen is set in Brooklyn in the nineteen-fifties and stars Dominic Chianese, Beth Fowler, Elizabeth Marvel, and others. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

ŠVEJK
Colin Teevan's superb adaptation of Jaroslav Hašek's "The Good Soldier Švejk," presented by Theatre for a New Audience, is a tale of the First World War literally told by an idiot. Here, on a set that seems painted by Franz Kline in his cups, tortuous thick black lines demark Gideon Davey's wonderful tilted set. Stephen Spinella plays Švejk with wit and sweetness, making him a compelling fool—a sort of clown of carnage—who rebounds from every insane situation with his humanity intact and the world's barbarity exposed. Elegantly staged by Dalia Ibelhauptaite, who keeps the excellent cast on their toes. (Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Through Dec. 5.)

TRYING
In a touching, traditional drama by Joanna McClelland Glass, a determined young Canadian secretary (Kati Brazda) with a passion for Wallace Stevens tries to straighten out the paperwork of a crotchety lawmaker, Francis Biddle (Fritz Weaver). Directed by Sandy Shinner. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200.)

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
In Balanchine's "Nutcracker," the Christmas party is gemütlich, the nightmare scary, the tree tall, and Candyland just what it should be: a child's dream of heaven. Tchaikovsky wrote the music at the peak of his powers as a fabulist, and Balanchine's imagination rose to meet it. (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Dec. 1-2 and Dec. 7 at 6, Dec. 2-3 at 8, Dec. 4 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 5 at 1 and 5. Through Jan. 2.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE
The company's season at City Center begins (see This Week). The week includes two premières: "Love Stories" and Donald Byrd's "Burlesque," set to music by Louis Armstrong. ♦ Dec. 1 at 7 (opening-night gala): "Love Stories" and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 2 at 8: "Heart Song," "Juba," and "Bounty Verses." ♦ Dec. 3 at 8: "Night Creature," "Treading," "Burlesque," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 4 at 2: "Love Stories," "Juba," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 4 at 8: "Heart Song," "Love Stories," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 5 at 3: "Bounty Verses," "Juba," and "Revelations." Dec. 4 at 7:30: "Heart Song," Burlesque," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 7: "Bounty Verses," "Burlesque," and "Grace." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Through Jan. 2.)

"JACOBSON 100: THE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION"
The work of the Russian choreographer Leonid Jacobson was suppressed during the Soviet era, and his ballets have rarely been seen in the West. But now, on the centenary of his birth, New York audiences get the chance to see more than a dozen of his trademark choreographic miniatures, which encapsulate the story and emotions of an entire ballet in a short piece. Performers include Alina Cojocaru and Johan Kobborg, of the Royal Ballet, and dancers from the Kirov Ballet and the Vaganova Ballet Academy. Some highlights of the evening: "The Lovers" and "Jewish Wedding," set to music by Shostakovich. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-764-6461. For more information, visit www.spbs.org. Dec. 5 at 5 and Dec. 8-9 at 7:30. Gala performance on Dec. 6 at 7:30.)

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE STUDIO COMPANY
Four works are presented: a new ballet by Stephen Mills, set to Philip Glass's Tirol Concerto for Piano and Orchestra; the New York première of Dominic Walsh's "Alchemy"; Anton Dolin's "Variations for Four"; and Arthur Saint-Leon's "La Vivandiere." (Skirball Center, 566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-992-8484. Dec. 3 at 8 and Dec. 4 at 2 and 8.)

BALLET HISPÁNICO
"Eternamente y un Día," Peter Pucci's new dance for the company, is set to Mexican folk songs recorded by the Kronos Quartet and follows the dancers' stock exuberance down familiar paths. Two programs alternate: one pairs Pucci's dance with Ramón Oller's elegiac, Gypsy-themed "Bury Me Standing"; the other features last year's historical survey of Latin social dance, "NightClub." ♦ Nov. 30 at 7:30, Dec. 1-2 and Dec. 7 at 8, and Dec. 4-5 at 2: "Eternamente y un Día" and "Bury Me Standing." ♦ Dec. 3-4 at 8 and Dec. 5 at 7:30: "NightClub." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Through Dec. 12.)

TERE O'CONNOR DANCE
A current of hysteria flows through O'Connor's willfully spare new work, "Frozen Mommy." Long moments of stillness and silence bespeak turmoil below the surface, which surges forth in sarcastic gestures, screams, laughing fits, and bursts of aggression. The dancers try to brush off the disruptions by breaking out of character and making the audience laugh, but the uneasiness does not go away. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Dec. 2-3 at 8 and Dec. 4 at 2 and 8. Through Dec. 11.)

"CALIFORNIA"
John Jasperse tackles choreography like a neurologist tackles the brain: he seeks to identify existing connections and to spark new ones. This new piece reflects his associations with the California Gold Rush; from the strike-it-rich dreams that pulled contractors west to the bottomed-out reality they found. The

dancers move amid a massive sculpture by Ammar Eloueini, to a score by Jonathan Bepler. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. Dec. 7 at 7:30. Through Dec. 11.)

SAM KIM / LUCIANA ACHUGAR
Gyrating in trancelike calm in front of a Mylar curtain, Sam Kim and her backup dancers channel the angst of eighties suburban teen-agers, blasting alternative bands in the basement. Kim's "Nobody Understands Me" has flashes of disco, aerobics, voguing, and club dancing, but it's performed with the straight-ahead quality of a person pumping iron, until the girls finally decide that they just wanna have fun. Kim shares the bill at Dance Theatre Workshop with the Uruguayan choreographer Luciana Achugar, whose political piece "A Supernatural Return to Love" features a chorus line of six women in uniform, dancing with blood-spattered hands. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Dec. 1-4 at 7:30.)

DUŠAN TÝNEK DANCE THEATRE
The Czech-born choreographer presents a new work called "Camera Illuminata," inspired by the camera obscura, the dark chamber that many Renaissance painters used to help them capture likenesses, and set to music by Beethoven, Biber, Ali Jihad Racy, and Yann Tiersen, along with a new composition by Ted Reichman. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-334-7479. Dec. 3-5 at 8.)

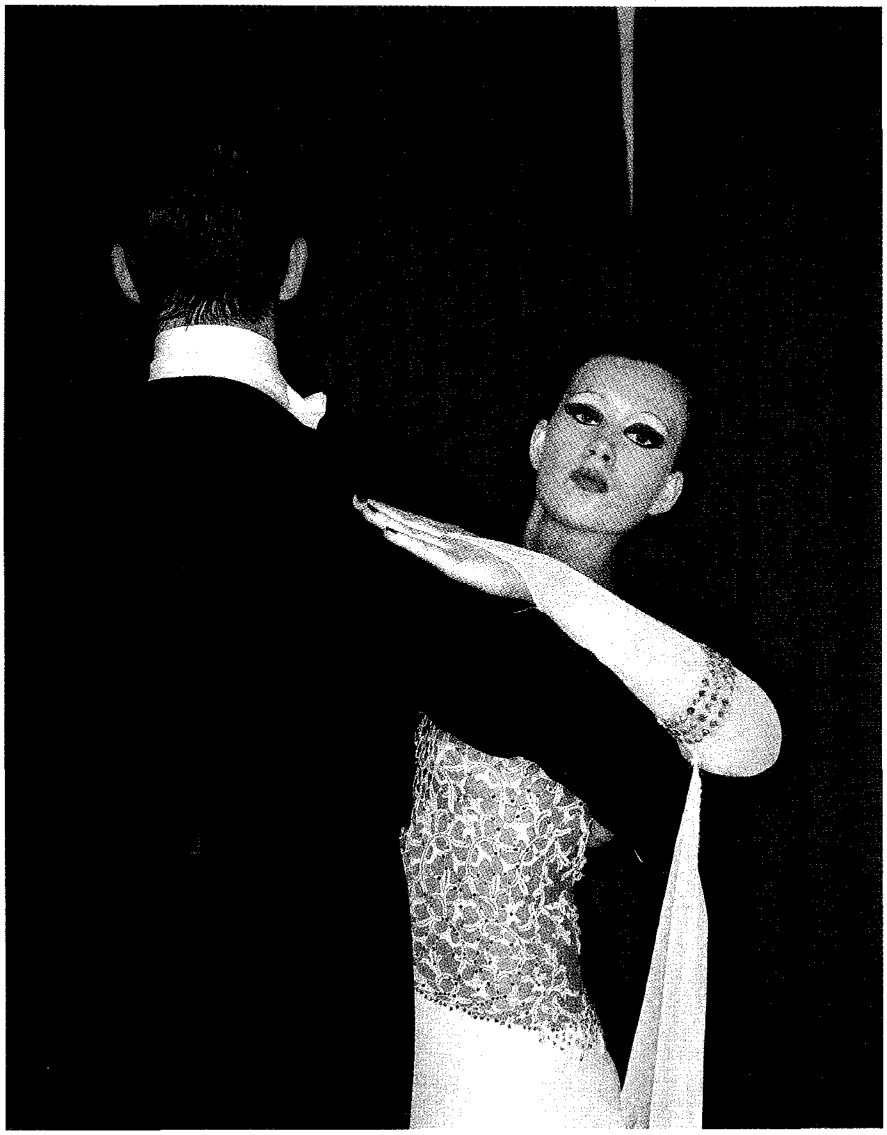
MOVEMENT RESEARCH IMPROVISATION FESTIVAL 2004
Danspace's annual showcase returns with three evenings of dance by more than a dozen local choreographers. Curated by Jonah Bokaer, DD Dorvillier, Miguel Gutierrez, K. J. Holmes, Ishmael Houston-Jones, Isabel Lewis, and Yvonne Meier. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Dec. 2-3 and Dec. 5 at 8:30.)

"THE REMEMBER PROJECT 2004"
Dancers Responding to AIDS present the tenth annual twelve-hour festival of dance in honor of those who live with H.I.V./AIDS and of those who have died of it. Scores of companies perform, including Pilobolus, Martha Graham Dance Company, Mark Morris Dance Group, Merce Cunningham Dance Company, and Limón Dance Company. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. For more information, call 212-840-0770. Dec. 4, noon to midnight.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

"HIGHLIGHTS IN JAZZ"
A triple bill with the master drummer **Roy Haynes,** the singer-pianist **Bob Dorough,** and the piano-and-guitar duo of **Benny Green** and **Russell Malone.** (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 212-220-1460. Dec. 2 at 8.)

BARENAKED LADIES
The Canadian ensemble of smart-alecky goofballs known for sprightly pop and cheap laughs returns. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 212-307-7171. Dec. 6-7 at 8.)



An untitled photograph by Morten Nilsson, from his "Dance" series at ClampArt.

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

ARLENE GROCERY
95 Stanton St., between Ludlow and Orchard Sts. (212-358-1633)—Dec. 3: "Rock Her," a monthly night of female-fronted rock-and-roll acts, brings together **Marianne Pillsbury,** a smart-mouthed vixen who recalls early Liz Phair, **Greta Gertler,** an Australian expat with a weakness for lushly orchestrated seventies-era pop, **Jennie Arnau,** a strong vocalist whose polished anthems sound ready made for a WB soap, and **Nora O'Connor,** a veteran of the Chicago alt-country scene.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Dec. 3: **Air Supply.** The Australian soft rockers may be the punch line for many dismissive jokes, but in the early eighties their syrupy ballads earned them big bucks. Dec. 6: **Gaelic Storm** got its big break in 1997 when it appeared in the steerage-party scene in the film "Titanic." Dec. 7: The roots-rocker **Edwin McCain** is a townsman of Charleston's favorite sons, Hootie & the Blowfish.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Dec. 3: The clear-voiced and clear-eyed singer-songwriter **Dar Williams.** Dec. 5: **Los Straitjackets** (surf rockers who perform in colorful Mexican-wrestler's masks) and the **World Famous Pontani Sisters** (burlesque dancers who perform in colorful bits of strategically placed fabric). Dec. 7: **Calexico,** a band whose principal members have spent time as session players for musicians as varied as Giant Sand, Victoria Williams, and Neko Case, turns out moody, mysterious, and sometimes menacing Western rock.

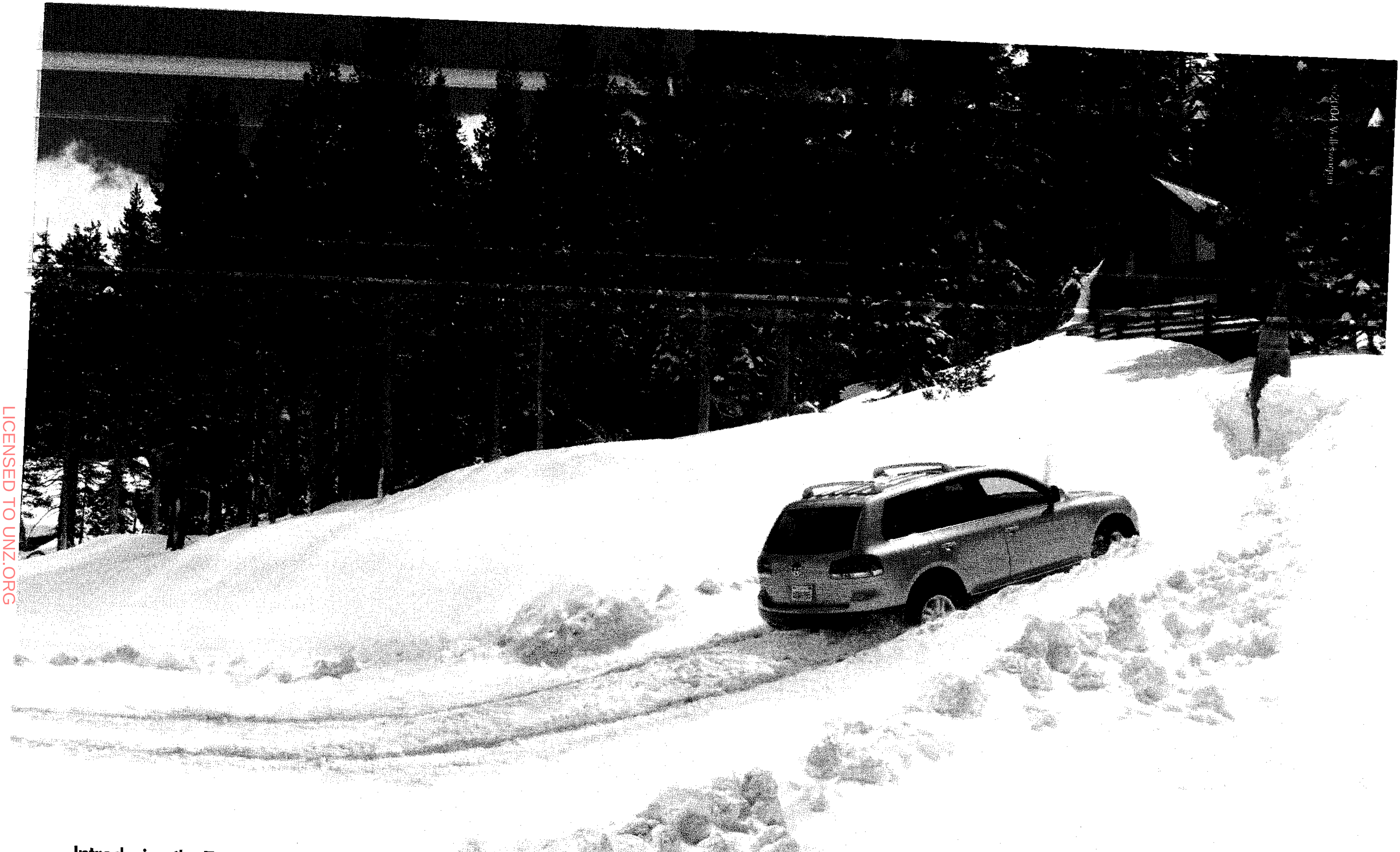
IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Dec. 2: The slick bluegrass pickings of the **Del McCoury Band** and the down-home Americana of Ithaca's **Donna the Buffalo.** Dec. 3-5: The Dayton-based indie-rock group **Guided by Voices** stops by on its farewell tour, begging the question of which will be missed more, the sterling wordplay of its front man, Robert Pollard, or Pollard's drunken, gleefully shambolic performances. ♦ The Swing Dance Society gathers here the first Sunday of each month, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the Society, call 212-696-9737.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Dec. 1: **Nancy Sinatra** (see This Week). Dec. 2: **Tony Joe White,** the swamp-rocking author of "Polk Salad Annie," "Rainy Night in Georgia," and other hits. Dec. 4: The Brazilian singer **Luciana Souza** sets the poems of Pablo Neruda to music. Dec. 7: **Beausoleil.** The Cajun fiddler Michael Doucet and his band offer a night of warm Louisiana grooves.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—Dec. 2: The Virginia songwriter **Paul Curreri** delivers literate, delicately muscled country blues with nimble guitar and even nimbler lyrics.

LIVING ROOM
154 Ludlow St. (212-533-7235)—Dec. 2: The **Moth Wranglers,** a bicoastal collaboration between the New Yorker LD Beghtol, of the baroque chamber-pop band Flare, and the San Franciscan Chris Xefos, a former member of King Missile (the band that gave the world the songs "Jesus Was Way Cool" and "Detachable Penis"). The Wranglers are celebrating the release of their latest record, "Never Better." Dedicated to the surrealist poet and cultural catalyst Charles Henri Ford, it was made with banjo, melodica, theremin, toy piano, and other such instrumentation, and the music veers from rural-sounding lovelorn laments to futuristic tape-loop odysseys. With **Clintellectual,** which is Clint Asay of the gay punk-cabaret band the Isotoners, and the visual artist and ukulele player **Larry Krone.**

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Dec. 3: Nashville's **Legendary Shack Shakers** cook up a wild brew that's two parts rockabilly, one part punk. Dec. 4: By

©2004 Volkswagen

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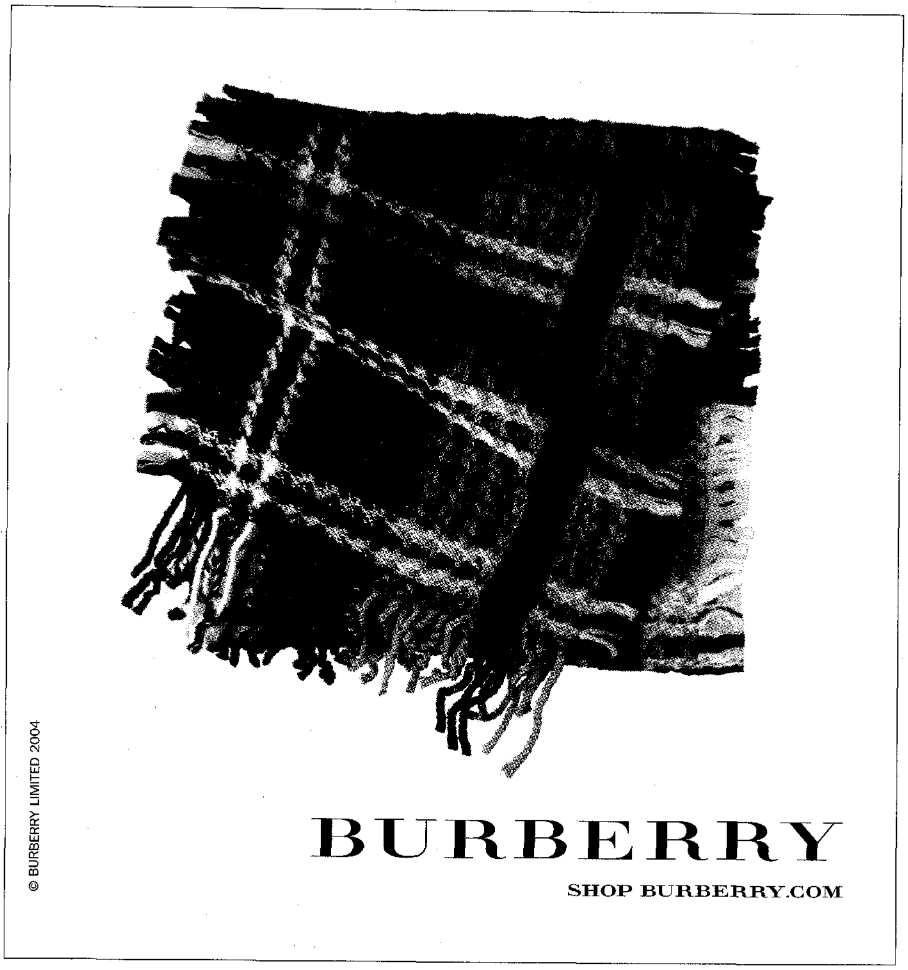
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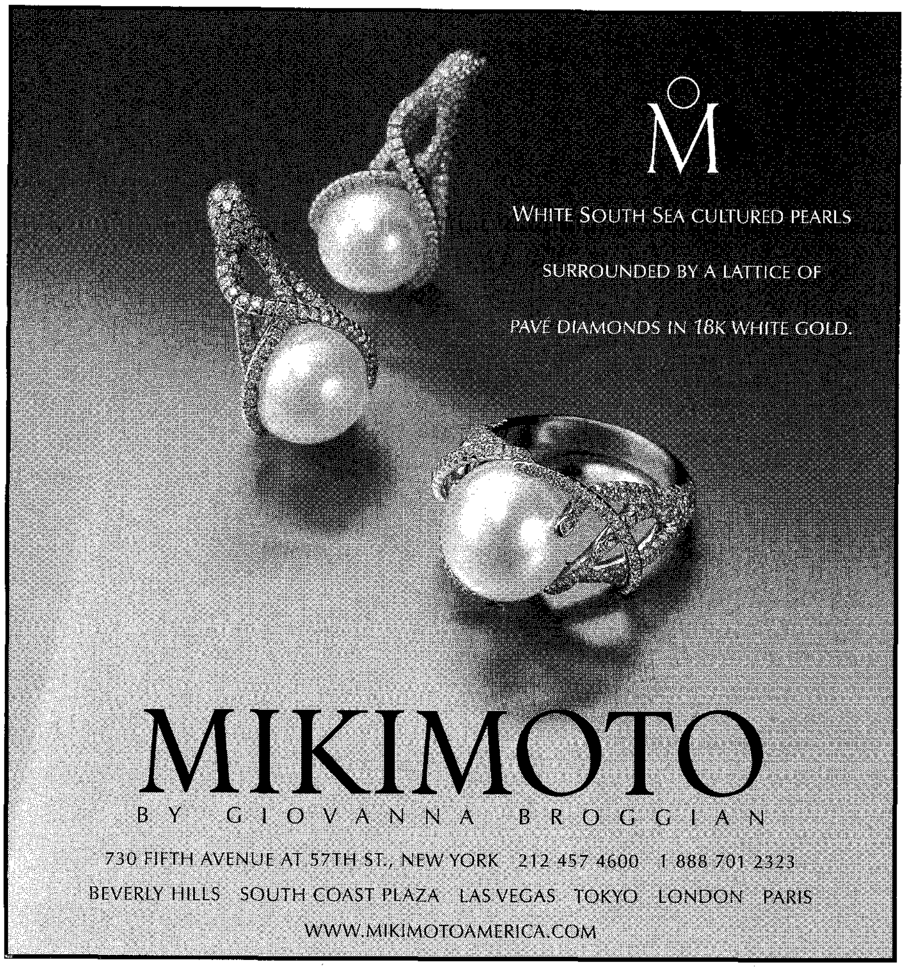
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using a cello and a mixing board along with the standard guitar-and-keyboard new-band setup, the Bay Area transplants **Out Hud** create layered, distortion-heavy songs that are also universally danceable.

NORTHSIX

66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—Dec. 3: The **Danielson Famile,** an avant-Christian rock band from New Jersey led by Daniel Smith. He and his brothers and sisters (they actually are a family) favor audience participation (as might be expected), but they limit it to leading sing-alongs. Smith, who also records as **Br. Danielson,** will also perform a solo set dressed in a tree costume. With the erstwhile Moldy Peach **Kimya Dawson.**

PIANOS

158 Ludlow St. (212-505-3733)—Dec. 2: The New York City ensemble **Electric Turn to Me** plays thick and busy art rock overlaid by the Teutonic stylings of their front woman, Silke. Some consider their shows aggressively theatrical, while others find them needlessly melodramatic, but few are left indifferent. Dec. 4: **Uncut** started three years ago in Toronto as a partnership between the dance-music guru Jake Fairley and the guitarist Ian Worang. Fairley left to pursue techno music, and the band has grown into a guitar-driven quartet that retains just enough moodiness to honor its roots.

ROTHKO

116 Suffolk St., at Rivington St. (212-475-7088)—Dec. 4: An evening of high decibels, amphetamine-fuelled velocity, and sweaty confrontation is assured as Vice Records, an offshoot of the trendsetting magazine, presents the local art punks the **Panthers,** the noisy Canadian duo **Death from Above 1979,** and the creepily claustrophobic indie-rock outfit **Vietnam.**

TONIC

107 Norfolk St. (212-358-7503)—Dec. 1: The **Billy Nayer Show** traffics in a strange hybrid of performance art, cabaret, and alternative rock.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL

59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through Dec. 30: It isn't difficult to imagine the elegant chanteuse **Andrea Marcovicci** as one of Fred Astaire's partners swirling through an R.K.O. musical of the thirties. Marcovicci has no doubt imagined the very same thing, and her new program features the great screen (and stage) songs written for the Master.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA

Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Through Dec. 5: The **Joey DeFrancesco** trio. The exciting, if musically verbose, DeFrancesco is determined to keep the Hammond-organ aesthetic alive and thriving in the twenty-first century. He's joined by the tenor saxophonist and former Ray Charles associate **David (Fathead) Newman.**

IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Dec. 1-5: **Pharoah Sanders,** a veteran of high-energy free jazz, meets up with two younger guns, the saxophonist **Kenny Garrett** and the powerhouse drummer **Jeff (Tain) Watts.** Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** is here on Tuesdays.

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—The pianist **Jacky Terrasson** (here with his trio through Dec. 5) has yet to deliver a recording that delivers on his promise, but onstage he displays nervy moves and deep pockets of lyricism that keep you believing that someday he will. The saxophonist **Ravi Coltrane** sits in on the last three nights.

SWEET RHYTHM

88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (212-255-3626)—Dec. 3-4: **John Hicks.** More is more for the veteran pianist, but his passionate whiplash keyboard excursions are as bracing now as they were back in the sixties, when he was first gaining attention with Art Blakey and others.

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through Dec. 12: **Bill Frisell,** a brilliantly original guitarist who upended the instrument's traditional role in jazz, is also a gifted composer and arranger. The latter

two attributes will be on display during this two-week engagement as the trumpeter **Ron Miles** and the saxophonist **Greg Tardy** join his trio. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—**"The Colonial Andes: Tapestries and Silverwork 1530-1830"** gathers weavings—featuring native symbols like the puma and butterfly mixed with imported mermaids and unicorns—and such a treasury of silver artifacts that entire galleries seem encased in gleaming foil. Through Dec. 12. ♦ **"Princely Splendor: The Dresden Court, 1580-1620."** Through Jan. 30. ♦ Coincident with the Whitney's retrospective, the Met showcases a choice handful of works from its permanent collection in **"Romare Bearden at the Met."** Through March 6. ♦ A wealth of art and artifacts recovered from the tombs of ancient luminaries are on view in **"China: Dawn of a Golden Age, 200-750 A.D."** Through Jan. 23. ♦ **"Gilbert Stuart,"** a show of works by the iconic painter of George Washington. Through Jan. 16. ♦ **"William Kentridge."** Through Feb. 20. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

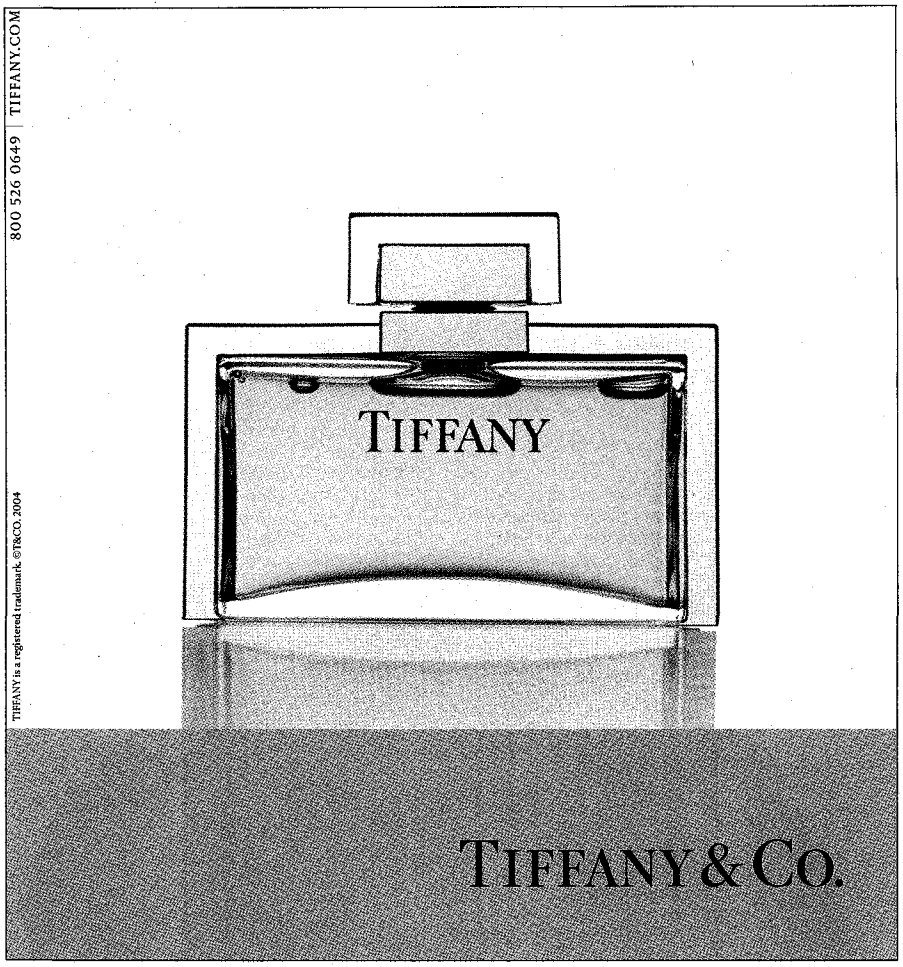
TABLES FOR TWO

ABBOCCATO
138 W. 55th St. (212-265-4000)—In the nineties, Molyvos on Seventh Avenue helped elevate the level of Manhattan's Greek cuisine before it settled into being a favorite fallback reservation. Now the owners have opened an ambitious Italian spot around the corner. Rough gray brick walls make the small room feel spacious, but it's not immediately clear what the space is intended for; the chrome beaded curtains, the snaky iron candelabras, and the rubbery feel of the chair cushions suggest some kind of sex club, especially when the Italian pop they play (quietly, luckily) veers toward disco. The food, too, is an adventure that can turn weird on you.

There must be something to learn from all the geography on the menu, which makes local stops from Alto Adige to Sardinia. At least it proves that Italy is a big country: a terrific winter soup from Trieste, with cranberry beans, potato, and sauerkraut, seems too Slavic to be on the same menu with pesce crudo, that increasingly inescapable Italian sashimi and ceviche. Some dishes are pleasantly grandiose (bucatini carbonara comes with super-rich poached duck eggs and duck prosciutto), and some come across as needlessly pretentious (monkfish is "dusted" with fennel pollen). So how to penetrate the mysteries of the place? It seems like a start when the waiter opens the menu and says, "Let me tell you what we're trying to do here." But instead of offering a lesson on Umbrian heirloom lentils or Sardinian pasta styles, they try to do what every Italian restaurant from the Piazza Navona to Mulberry Street tries to do—sweet-talk you with *primi* and *secondi* terminology and con you into ordering too much food.

Generally, the fare at Abboccato is serious and complicated, but the dishes the kitchen has already perfected suggest great promise, such as veal sweetbreads sautéed with speck, wild mushrooms, and *vincotto*—an aged-grape-must syrup. To preview a less promising future for the place, order the Vaniglia e Cioccolato—veal cheeks with vanilla and wild-boar chunks with chocolate, laid out in parallel streaks on the plate. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $26-$30.)

—*Owen Phillips*



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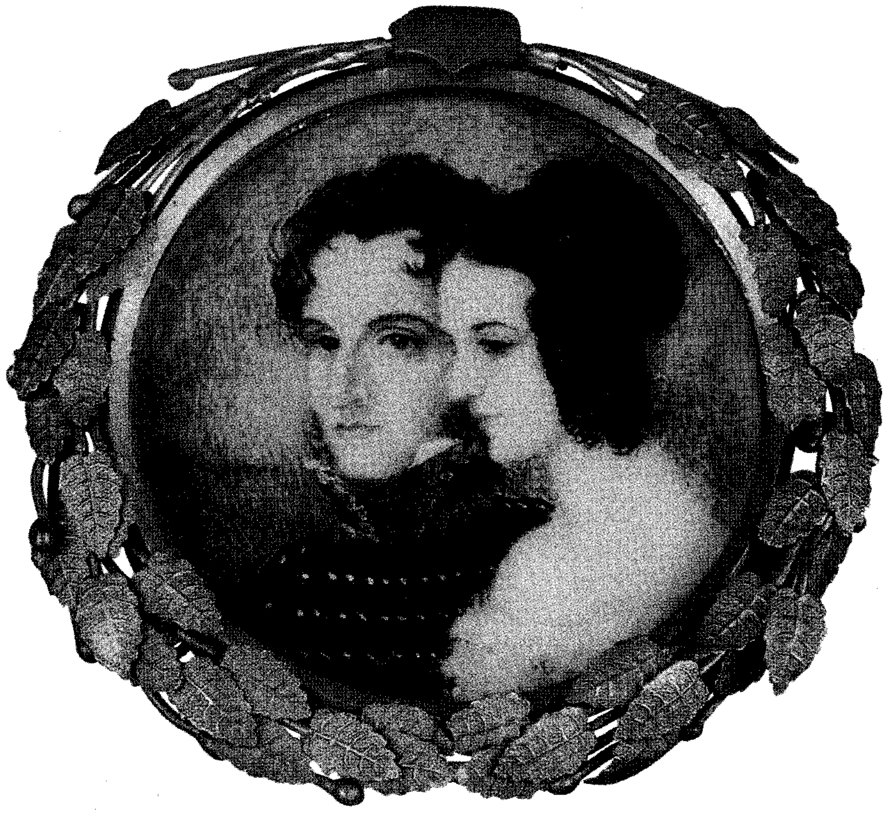
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—The museum has reopened in its renovated and enlarged home and is presenting a series of exhibits related to its metamorphosis. ♦ **"Yoshio Taniguchi: Nine Museums"** surveys other work by the architect who redesigned the museum. Through Jan. 31. ♦ **"Michael Wesely: Open Shutter at the Museum of Modern Art."** The German photographer turned his long-exposure method (he has left the shutter open for as long as three years) on MOMA while it was under construction. Through mid-2005. ♦ **"Projects 82: Mark Dion—Rescue Archaeology."** Dion excavated traces of the former Rockefeller town house from beneath the sculpture garden for this site-specific project. Through March 14. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Fridays, 10:30 to 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"The Aztec Empire"** lines the Guggenheim's spiral with more than four hundred artifacts, from carvings depicting harvest work to implements for human sacrifice. Through Feb. 13. ♦ The Guggenheim has the largest collection of work by Vasily Kandinsky in the United States, and its curators have decided to devote one gallery to his work permanently. **"Kandinsky Gallery: An Inaugural Selection"** kicks things off. ♦ **"Keith Haring: New Wave Aztec."** Through Feb. 6. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)



"Retratos: 2,000 Years of Latin American Portraits," at Museo del Barrio.

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—**"Isamu Noguchi: Master Sculptor."** Through Jan. 16. ♦ **"Bill Viola: Five Angels for the Millennium,"** a video installation made in 2001. Through March 6. ♦ **"James Lee Byars: The Perfect Silence."** Drawings, sculptures, and installations by the artist, who died in 1997. Through March 6. ♦ Jennifer Pastor's **"The Perfect Ride."** Through Jan. 16. ♦ The city's museums are full of Romare Bearden's work right now, but **"The Art of Romare Bearden"** is the biggest, most thorough show. Through Jan. 9. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

MUSEO DEL BARRIO
Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (212-831-7272)—**"Retratos: 2,000 Years of Latin American Portraits"** opens this week, with more than a hundred paintings and sculptures dating from pre-Columbian times to the present. Opens Dec. 3. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 5, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—The German photographer and filmmaker Katharina Sieverding is not well known here, though she has been making work since the nineteen-sixties. Consisting almost entirely of huge closeups of the artist's face—tinted red, painted gold, split in thirds, laid out in grids—**"Katharina Sieverding: Close Up"** slips past the issues of self-representation one imagines it was meant to raise and instead settles perilously near to solipsism. The best piece—a silent, two-hour, sixteen-mm. document of Sieverding's 1978 visit to China—was actually shot by her collaborator Klaus Mettig. Through Jan. 23. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—A show of Kerry James Marshall's recent work, **"One True Thing: Meditations on Black Aesthetics"** augments the artist's signature canvases (which recast nineteenth-century-style history paintings with African-American figures) with sculptures, drawings, video, and installation work. Through Jan. 9. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6; Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

BRYAN HUNT
Seven of the gallery walls each bear a single "Airship" sculpture from the mid to late seventies. The airships—blimp-shaped featherweight structures built from spruce or balsa wood and wrapped in silk paper and metallic leaf—are hung above head level, floating out from the walls as easily and elegantly as puffs of smoke. Through Dec. 11. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 212-744-7400.)

A. R. PENCK
Rough sculptural "Constructions" by an avatar of German Expressionist art are laid out like specimens on a platform covered with gray velvet. "Year of the Tiger" (1986) includes scraps of a ripped-up orange scarf attached to a wire armature. His "Standart Model" sculptures from the early seventies are constructed of cardboard, felt, scavenged metal lids and jars and are often smothered in sloppy coats of gray acrylic paint. Uninitiated viewers might have trouble seeing a bottle wrapped in tape, a bunch of cans tied together with string, or a metal strip bent into an abstract bouquet as sculpture, but Penck's aggressively anti-aesthetic stance isn't completely alien; it's echoed in the work of other artists, like Franz West. Through Dec. 18. (Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

JOHN BOCK / BENDIX HARMS
Bock, a German, is Europe's latest crowd-pleasing Beuysian clown and shaman. His jerry-rigged junk-sculptural environments call to mind the philosophical fun houses of Thomas Hirschhorn, only they're more fun; they revel in gross substances like Paul McCarthy's work, but somehow sweetly. At this show, visitors may explore the interior of a huge metal cube to find a dramatically lit crawl space containing an exuberant mess of broken things and assorted gunk, or climb a ladder that leads to a small sculpture. Elsewhere, a video projection shows the handsome Bock in enigmatic action with berries, aspirin tablets, and whatnot. Not one for wall work, he chose to line the show with fetchingly bumptious paintings by his countryman Harms. Through Dec. 4. (Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663.)

MARC CHAGALL
A roundup of diminutive Chagalls from the last half of his oeuvre (1940-80) that features all the familiar elements: flying animals, clinging couples, and giant, ominous hovering flower arrangements. The works range from bare sketches to completed paintings. Themes include religion, performance, the role of the artist, and the life of communities. Visionary renditions of village life are seen in "The Fish in the Village Sky" and "Peasant with Rooster," but the city drops in for an appearance in the saturated, blue-and-green nocturnal "Le Pont Neuf" and the almost Impressionistic "Sight of Paris." Through Dec. 8. (Stendhal, 545 W. 20th St. 212-366-1549.)

GILBERT & GEORGE
Striving to remain relevant, Britain's famous duo have updated their signature grid photo works with graffiti tags, Islamic motifs, and gang references, presented in a two-gallery extravaganza under the title "Perversive Pictures." Each image of them posed in their stodgy suits calls to mind the cultural eclipse of English gentlemen since their début as "Living Sculpture" in the sixties. Given that context, the titles are the only thing that really resonates, from "Oi!" and "Haram" to a graffiti-inspired work called "White Bastards." Through Dec. 18. (Sonnabend, 536 W. 22nd St. 212-627-1018; Lehmann Maupin, 540 W. 26th St. 212-255-2923.)

DANA SCHUTZ
Schutz's strange world includes Cyclopes and robot-like humans, piano keyboards with fingers for keys, and a forest hung with mirrors. Electric hues and exuberant brushstrokes underscore the sense of a society gone feral. The paintings' precedents can be found in German Expressionism's expert, naïve crudeness or Philip Guston's political canvases, but these have an updated palette and a sci-fi soul. Through Dec. 11. (Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700.)

SHIRLEY TSE
A pair of installations proposes links between the electrical grid and personal geography, mapped in fleshlike, Silly Putty-esque plastic. Pinkish-beige or bone-white, weirdly pliable and smooth, Tse's favored sculptural material is shaped into fantasy versions of utilitarian objects—a tent, a swivelling makeup mirror, a toilet—each symbolizing a location Tse finds resonant—Beijing, New York, Chinatown. The second project, a group of chest-high power towers, is constructed in the same un-

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Excerpted from *Home Theater For Dummies*

- Appreciating the home theater experience
- Defining HDTVs
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In the following excerpt, authors Danny Briere and Pat Hurley — who also authored *HDTV For Dummies* — give you a brief overview of home theater systems and then focus on flat-panel TVs — specifically, *liquid crystal display* (or LCD) models. LCD TVs are elegant, thin and light, offer high performance and can hang on the wall or be placed just about anywhere.

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The Basic Home Theater

So what's in a home theater? Well, a home theater is largely what you make of it, but we think that at least three major things constitute the core of a home theater:

- **A large-screen display.** The heart of the display is basically a television (whether projection or flat-panel).
- **A digital video source.** Although you could say that a digital satellite or cable service is a digital video source, we mandate a DVD capability. DVD is the focal point for all digital video innovation that drives your home theater.
- **A surround-sound capability.** You need to have surround sound to take advantage of all the audio power stored in your DVD content and mimic the theater experience.

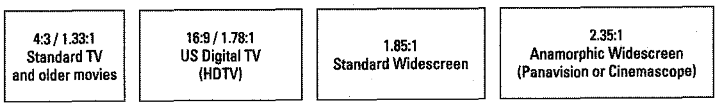
REMEMBER

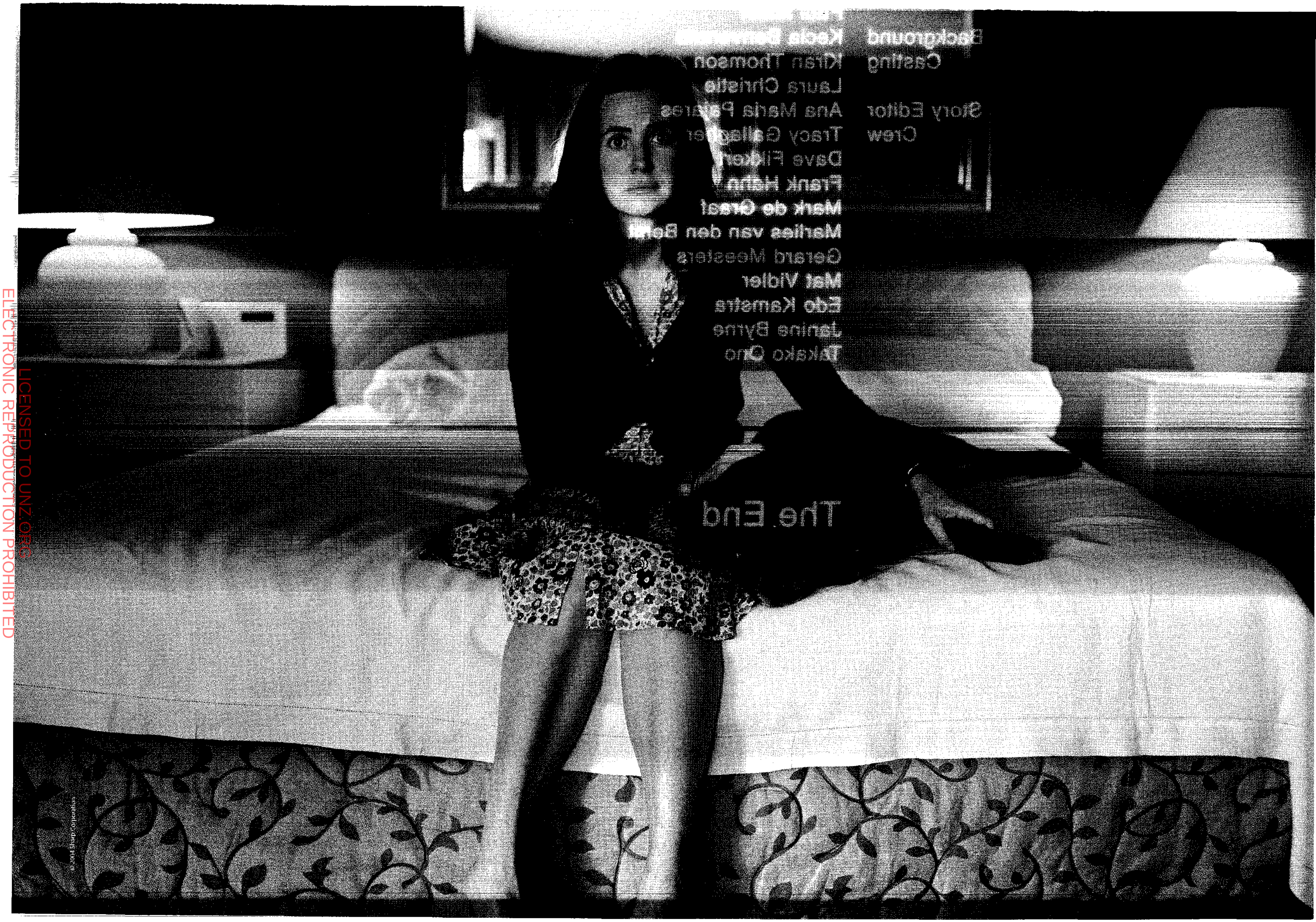
If you're lacking any of these elements, you really don't have a home theater. Without the display and surround sound, you lose the impact of the visual and audio experience — and without a digital video source, you just have a big, loud TV system.

Learning the Lingo

If you're shopping for a display for your home theater, you're probably going to run into sales people, Web sites, and brochures full of acronyms and unfamiliar terms. Here are some of the most significant features you'll hear about:

- **Monitor versus television.** When a display comes with a built-in TV tuner (so you can plug in an antenna or a cable connection and immediately watch TV), we call it a *television.* Some displays come without any built-in TV-tuning capabilities; we call these displays *monitors.*
- **Resolution.** This measures how precise and sharp a picture your display can create. For example, you might see a plasma display with a resolution of 800 x 600. The 800 refers to horizontal resolution (the number of pixels, or individual points) across the screen, and 600 refers to the vertical number (like the scan lines on a conventional TV).
- **Connections.** We recommend that you connect all your source devices directly to your A/V receiver, not to your display, to simplify both hookup and operation. We do recommend, however, that you choose a display with connectors for your antenna and/or cable system and at least one connector each for composite, S-Video, and component video connections.
- **Contrast ratio.** This ratio measures how well a display can show bright brights and nuanced darks. You see this as a numeric ratio, such as 500:1, representing the whitest white compared to the blackest black. A higher contrast ratio is better.
- **Aspect ratio.** This is the ratio of screen width to screen height. Displays can be shaped for widescreen material (16:9) or for traditional TV viewing (4:3). The four most common aspect ratios are shown in the figure below. In general, we recommend 16:9 aspect ratio displays.

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Getting Ready for HDTV

Deciding on HDTV — or *High-Definition Television,* the highest-quality television signal today — or a traditional TV is probably the most important home-theater decision you can make. If you can afford it today, we highly recommend that you get an HDTV or HDTV-ready display now. The primary HDTV standards are:

- **720p.** This uses *progressive scan* (hence the *p*), a system which sequentially draws all 720 lines in each frame, and provides 720 lines of resolution. By comparison, NTSC (your normal, over-the-air video signal) has less than 480 lines of resolution. 720p uses a 16:9 widescreen aspect ratio.
- **1080i.** This variant uses *interlaced scanning* — a system which draws every other line in each frame — but provides 1080 lines of resolution. 1080i is also widescreen, with 16:9 aspect ratio.
- **1080p.** Some of today's most advanced displays are capable of resolving this progressive, high-resolution format.

A true HDTV can receive *over-the-air* (OTA), cable, or satellite HDTV broadcasts, and has the following key characteristics:

- **Resolution.** Can display true high-definition signals with at least 720 lines of horizontal resolution (720 lines of picture data stacked on top of each other on the screen).
- **Aspect ratio.** Has a widescreen aspect ratio of 16:9.
- **Tuner.** Has a built-in TV tuner, capable of decoding any over-the-air broadcast format defined by the ATSC digital television standard, or cable TV or satellite broadcasts.

HDTV-ready sets (also called *HDTV monitors*) must meet only the resolution and aspect-ratio requirements; they don't have an internal tuner. You'll need some sort of external tuner to pick up HDTV broadcasts. You will also encounter these two standards:

- **480p (EDTV).** This *enhanced-definition TV* standard provides higher-than-NTSC resolution, with progressive scan (NTSC is interlaced). EDTV can be (and often is) 16:9 widescreen, but is not required to be. EDTV allows you to view a 480-pixel image (rather than 720) using the traditional 4:3 aspect ratio. There are EDTVs and EDTV monitors.
- **480i (SDTV).** This is interlaced, non-widescreen (4:3), *standard-definition TV,* equivalent to analog broadcasts.

TIP Remember these terms — HDTV, EDTV, and SDTV — when shopping. They are often in the product descriptions; you need to know exactly what you are buying.

Demystifying LCD

If you have just about anything electronic, you've probably seen and used an LCD. LCDs offer high-resolution images with millions of color gradations. We prefer the widescreen versions of LCDs. LCDs have the following strong points when it comes to playing video:

- **Extremely high resolutions and wide viewing angles.**
- **Excellent color and higher brightness.**
- **PC-monitor-capable, available in small and large screen sizes.**
- **No burn-in.** LCDs use a separate backlight, instead of creating their own light with phosphors, so they're immune to this problem (plasmas are not, by the way). That, plus their low power consumption, can give them a longer lifespan.
- **Inherently progressive.** LCDs use millions of tiny transistors that can be individually controlled by the "brains" inside the display to easily handle progressive-scan sources, such as progressive-scan DVD and HDTV — unlike some direct-view systems.

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HDTV Sources

Several sources exist for HDTV content. Broadcast-network OTA HDTV is available free of charge from your local station. All you need is an HDTV with a built-in or external tuner, and an antenna. Cable services, too, have developed and launched their own high-definition channels. A small flurry of new networks specifically deliver HDTV channels to cable and satellite providers. To get into these HDTV cable signals, you need the following:

- An HDTV service contract with your cable or satellite company. Unlike broadcast, this isn't free — just as with all cable/satellite services.
- An HDTV satellite receiver or set-top box (for cable) designed to receive this programming.

TECHNICAL STUFF

The first iterations of "boxless" digital-cable systems are beginning to trickle onto the market. These systems utilize *digital-cable-ready* (DCR) TVs that have a slot for a "smart card" called the CableCARD™, which you can rent from your cable company. A customer with a CableCARD™ and a DCR HDTV can simply plug the CableCARD™ into the HDTV; the card basically gives the TV "permission" to unscramble encrypted premium channels.

Where to Find More Info

If you need more information on LCDs or HDTV, check out these sites:

- www.ce.org/hdtv
- www.nab.org
- www.dtv.gov
- www.sharpusa.com

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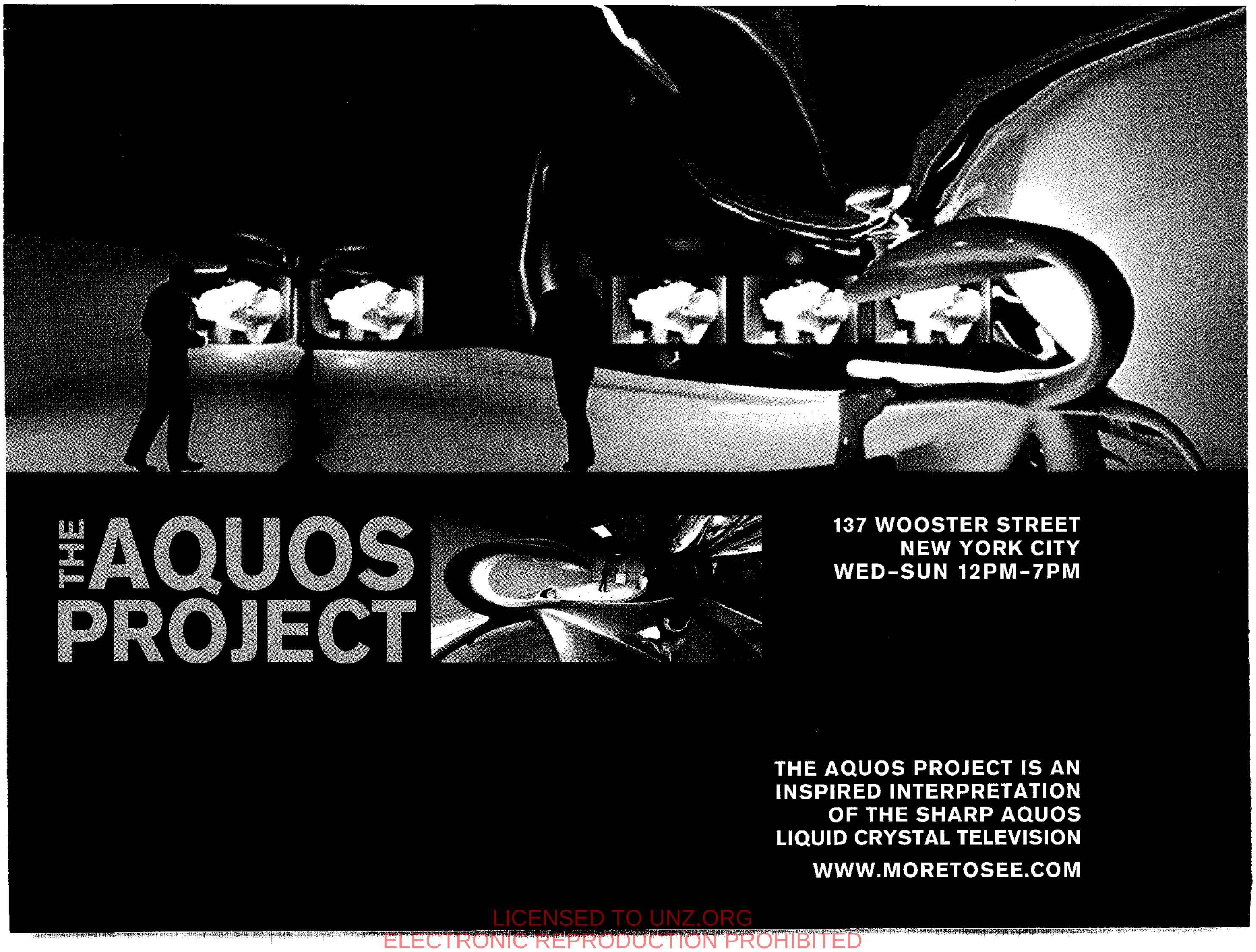

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comfortably sensuous plastic. Through Dec. 18. (Murray Guy, 453 W. 17th St. 212-463-7372.)

PETER WEGNER
In one room, Wegner proposes an "anti-Manhattan" with a series of works that defy our usual ways of seeing the urban world. Aerial views are rendered as large, detailed line drawings on carbon paper, their deep-purple lines barely visible against the shiny black. A twelve-foot suspended sculpture in translucent white plastic represents Manhattan's roadways, calling to mind anatomical charts of circulatory systems. Inverted photographs of urban street canyons make a formal experiment of a daily New York sight. In the second room, sixteen long rows of red paper, stacked with each sheet vertical and its end pointing out, replace one of the gallery walls. The tens of thousands of sheets of paper, in their barely shifting shades of deep red, are a marvel. Through Dec. 11. (Henry Urbach, 526 W. 26th St. 212-627-0974.)

CHRISTOPHER WOOL
Our leading painting-is-dead painter departs from his well-known word designs and wallpaper-like patterns for decorously blowsy abstract improvisations with gestural line and turpentine erasure, mostly in black-and-white. The effect is somewhere between spineless de Kooning and Gerhard Richter without tears. As always with Wool, the work rivets at first glance and then, on principle, goes positively nowhere. How can anything that looks so interesting prove to be so interest-proof? Wool's astute cynicism seems sure to lose its sting of up-to-date cogency, but not this year. Through Dec. 23. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

LOUISE LAWLER
Lawler goes behind the scenes at museums and art fairs, photographing art in various states of undress. A well-known Gerhard Richter painting, "Ema (Nude on a Staircase)," which echoes Duchamp's famous work, lies on its side in a MOMA gallery. In another photograph, Maurizio Cattelan's huge papier-mâché Picasso head, which he commissioned an actor to wear around MOMA in 1998, glares out from under plastic. Behind it hangs a Thomas Struth photograph of visitors wandering through the Metropolitan. This is true insider's art, and a return to form for Lawler. Through Dec. 23. (Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100.)

ABELARDO MORELL
Morell revitalized the camera obscura, making layered pictures by blocking all sources of light save for a pricked hole in a window that allows the outside in, albeit upside down and not to scale. In this show, Morell shows two paintings, by Edward Hopper and Roy Lichtenstein, fighting for attention in a Whitney gallery with the buildings directly across the street. The work he did in Cuba, where he was born in 1948, in which baroque bell towers and the expansive Art Deco Havana skyline are superimposed onto cracked apartment walls, plastic flowers, and rickety spiral stairways, seems to collapse time. And astoundingly complex silver-gelatin prints of the inner workings of clocks, motion studies of falling pitchers and a hammer beating lead, and a contraption of laboratory tubes and beakers show an exciting new direction. Through Dec. 4. (Benrubi, 41 E. 57th St. 212-888-6007.)

"STAGING HAPPINESS"
This craftily curated show begins with vintage photographs from the mid-thirties that represent the vestiges of the Russian avant-garde working in the medium—Georgy Petrusov's image of Vera Mukhina's famous "Monument to the Workers and Peasant Women," doubled in a reflecting pool; Alexander Rodchenko's stern soldiers under a "Workers of the World Unite!" banner. A staged image from Max Alpert's famous "Twenty-four Hours in the Life of the Filippov Family," of father, mother, and children, all smiles, enjoying a picnic in front of their late-model roadster, was meant to convince non-Communist eyes that life in the U.S.S.R. was simply grand. Later, postwar photographs are heavily retouched and hand-painted, in some cases to the point of complete fabrication, culminating in the unforgettable montage of Lenin and Stalin chatting on a park bench. Through Dec. 30. (Nailya Alexander, 24 W. 57th St. 212-315-2211.)

"WALKER EVANS AND HIS EARLY CIRCLE"
Vintage photographs from the twenties and thirties place Walker Evans in the context of those he learned from (Ralph Steiner, Berenice Abbott) and those who learned from him. The artist Ben Shahn was Evans's New York roommate, Peter Sekaer travelled with him in the South for the Farm Security Administration, and Helen Levitt worked in his darkroom. Among the images are a tiny self-portrait of Evans in Paris in 1926 and an even tinier view of the Brooklyn Bridge that captures the grandeur of the whole soaring cathedral. Steiner's scenes include "American Rural Baroque," an ornate wicker rocking chair casting a staggered shadow on the porch. Levitt's New York street scenes include an image of a pregnant girl in saddle shoes looking askance at an exuberant friend who holds two milk jugs. Through Dec. 4. (Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.)

Short List

BILL BRANDT
Edwynn Houk, 745 Fifth Ave. 212-750-7070. Through Jan. 8.

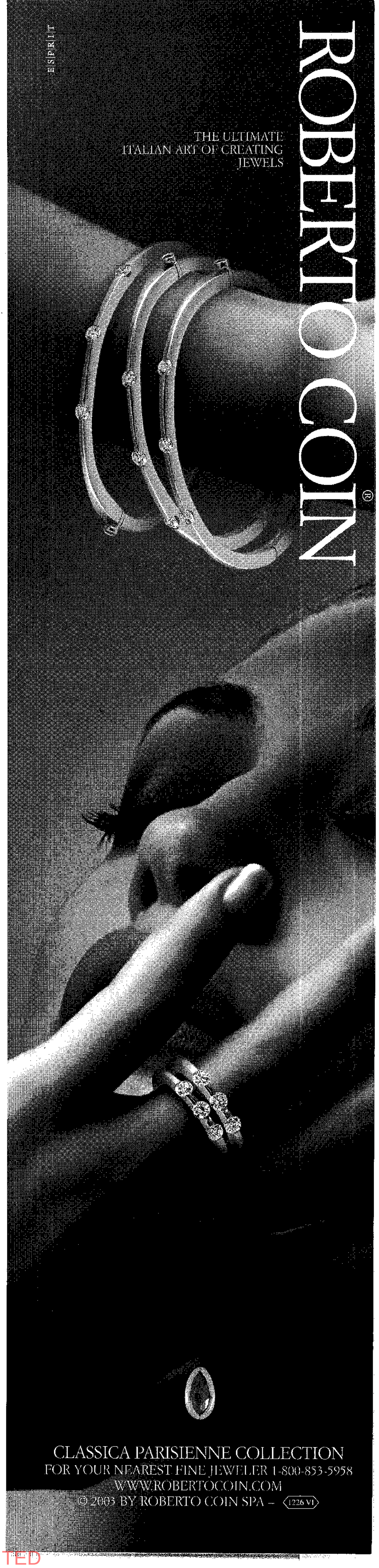
MORTEN NILSSON
ClampArt, 531 W. 25th St. 646-230-0020. Through Dec. 18.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S
Dec. 1 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: Several paintings from the New York apartment of Pierre Bergé, representing his fondness for Romantic frontier landscapes and Native American subjects, will be included in the afternoon session of this sale of American paintings, drawings, and sculptures. The morning sale features another impressive private collection, that of Rita and Daniel Fraad, which includes works by Bellows, Homer, Chase, Sargent ("Group with Parasols," expected to bring up to twelve million dollars), and Shinn. ♦ Dec. 2 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: When Yankee Stadium opened, on April 18, 1923, Babe Ruth wanted "to give the crowd a run for its money." And he did just that, hitting the ballpark's first home run with a Hillerich & Bradsby Co. Louisville Slugger—the centerpiece of this sale of baseball memorabilia. ♦ Dec. 2 at 11 A.M.: A sale of works from the O'Fallon collection of American Indian portraits by George Catlin. ♦ Dec. 3 at 2:30: Sir Isaac Newton is best known for the crystalline logic of his three laws of motion, but his great intellect often drifted far from the rigors of science. One set of notes in this sale of important Newton manuscripts wrestles with Mosaic law; another explores various alchemical principles, including the power of "philosopher's fire" and the importance of "semen solare," or sun seed. ♦ Dec. 4 at 10 A.M.: A sale of wine features vintages from the cellars of Domaine Clarence Dillon (which includes Château Haut Brion). (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)

CHRISTIE'S
Dec. 2 at 10 A.M.: Childe Hassam, fresh from a tribute at the Metropolitan Museum, anchors this sale of American paintings, drawings, and sculpture with his work "Mrs. Hassam in the Garden" (expected to fetch more than three million dollars). ♦ Dec. 2 at 2: This sale of Napoleonica from the collection of Dr. Philip F. Corso is a tour of the Emperor's rise and fall. In a portrait accompanied by a 1794 document signed with a flourish, he is a rakish young officer; his final appearance, in a finely detailed cast-plaster death mask from the Antommarchi cast, is powerfully macabre. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

SWANN
Dec. 7 at 10:30 A.M.: A sale of photographs, including works by Strand, Steichen, and Freed. ♦ Dec. 7 at 2:30: Photographic literature, including first editions of Robert Frank's "Les Américains," Brassaï's "Paris de Nuit," and James Agee and Walker Evans's "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men." (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)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CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Dec. 1 at 8: **"Aida,"** featuring Angela M. Brown (in the title role), Marianne Cornetti, Franco Farina, Ambrogio Maestri, and Kwangchul Youn; Marcello Viotti conducts. ♦ Dec. 4 at 1: With Norma Fantini and Irina Mishura replacing Brown and Cornetti. ♦ Dec. 2 and Dec. 6 at 7:30: The house that made its first plunge into Handelian opera in 1984, when it mounted "Rinaldo" for Marilyn Horne, presents its first performances of **"Rodelinda,"** one of the composer's supreme efforts for the stage, with a cast headed by Renée Fleming. The roster also features such singers as Stephanie Blythe, David Daniels, Bejun Mehta, Kobie van Rensburg, and John Relyea, while the orchestra is led by Harry Bicket, a noted Baroque conductor, who's making his Met début along with the director Stephen Wadsworth. ♦ Dec. 3 at 8: John Dexter's 1974 production of Verdi's **"I Vespri Siciliani,"** with Nelly Miricioiu, Francisco Casanova, Leo Nucci, and Samuel Ramey; Frédéric Chaslin conducts. ♦ Dec. 7 at 8: With Sondra Radvanonsky replacing Miricioiu. ♦ Dec. 4 at 8: **"Tannhäuser,"** with Petra-Maria Schnitzer (in her début, as Elisabeth), Elizabeth Bishop, Peter Seiffert, Thomas Hampson, and Kurt Moll; Mark Elder. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

AMATO OPERA
If there's any opera that suits this company's intimate East Village theatre, it's **"La Bohème,"** complete with starving artists and boisterous city scenes. Anthony Amato directs and conducts. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-8200. Dec. 4 at 7:30 and Dec. 5 at 2:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
The usually conservative orchestra has been on a new-music tear lately, concluding this week with the New York première of the grand orchestral version of Steve Reich's "Triple Quartet," a work originally written for the Kronos Quartet. David Robertson conducts it, along with Beethoven's jaunty Eighth Symphony and Bartók's Violin Concerto No. 2 (with Christian Tetzlaff). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Dec. 2 at 7:30, Dec. 3 at 2, and Dec. 4 at 8.) ♦ Tetzlaff will also join musicians from the Philharmonic in a chamber concert of music by Dvořák, Debussy (the Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp, with Tetzlaff on the string family's contralto instrument), and Mendelssohn (the String Quintet No. 2 in B-Flat Major). (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Dec. 5 at 3.)

ORPHEUS AND UTE LEMPER
The smoldering Teutonic songstress joins the conductorless chamber orchestra in one of its more daring concerts, an evening of songs by Weill, Eisler, Prévert, Piaf, and Brel, bookended by performances of Schulhoff's jazz-inflected Suite for Chamber Orchestra and Schoenberg's nostalgic Second Chamber Symphony. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 4 at 8.)

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
James Levine conducts a performance of Berlioz's dramatic symphony "Roméo et Juliette," featuring the singers Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, Matthew Polenzani, and Julien Robbins and the Tanglewood Festival Chorus. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 6 at 8.)

RECITALS

TILL FELLNER
The young Austrian pianist, admired for his Bach, plays the Fifth "French" Suite along with works by Haydn, Beethoven (the "Les Adieux" Sonata), and Liszt (the Sonata in B Minor) at Zankel Hall. (212-247-7800. Dec. 1 at 7:30.)

PACIFICA QUARTET
The vibrant and virtuosic young group (recent winners of the Cleveland Quartet Award) offer string quartets by Mendelssohn, Ligeti ("Métamorphoses Nocturnes"), and Brahms (the Piano Quintet, with Gilbert Kalish) under the auspices of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. Dec. 1 at 8.)

NY
CBarsotti

Auctions devoted to Babe Ruth and Isaac Newton are featured at Sotheby's this week.

BARGEMUSIC
Dec. 2-3 at 7:30: Alternate versions of great orchestral works make up the pianist's Jeffrey Biegel's program, which features Liszt's transcription of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, Grieg's "Holberg Suite," and the original 1924 manuscript version of "Rhapsody in Blue." ♦ Dec. 4 at 7:30 and Dec. 5 at 4: The pianist Steven Beck, the violinist Mark Peskanov, and the cellist Dmitry Kouzov gather to play music by Haydn, Rachmaninoff (the Cello Sonata), and Beethoven (the "Archduke" Trio). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

"ACCOLADES" SERIES: STEFAN JACKIW
The young violinist, a recent winner of the Avery Fisher Career Grant, makes his New York début with music by Beethoven, Prokofiev, Chopin, and Saint-Saëns. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. Dec. 2 at 8.)

WASHINGTON SQUARE CONTEMPORARY MUSIC SOCIETY
The world première of Louis Karchin's limpid "Roethke Songs" (sung by Lucy Shelton) and a performance of David Del Tredici's "Fantasy Pieces" (an impassioned serialist masterwork from 1960) are featured on the Society's latest program, at Merkin Concert Hall. (129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Dec. 2 at 8.)

MEASHA BRUEGGERGOSMAN
The young soprano, assisted by the pianist J. J. Penna, sings songs by Britten, Copland, Bolcom, and Ravel. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 3 at 7:30.)

"NANCARROW AT THE PIANO"
Christopher Taylor, a young pianist renowned for his steel fingers and capacious intellect, continues Miller Theatre's celebration of the maverick American composer. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Dec. 3 at 8.)

ARDITTI QUARTET
Nobody performs modernist works (like Helmut Lachenmann's formidable String Quartet No. 3, which will be given its New York première) with the sheer intelligence and power of this British foursome, which also offers music by Nancarrow, Ligeti, and Carter (the Fifth Quartet) in its concert at Zankel Hall. (212-247-7800. Dec. 4 at 7:30.)

"PATTERNS IN A CHROMATIC FIELD"
Charles Curtis and Aleck Karis perform Morton Feldman's hypnotic, eighty-minute microtonal masterpiece for cello and piano. (Great Hall, Cooper Union, Third Ave. at 7th St. 212-279-4200. Dec. 4 at 7:30.)

TRIO SOLISTI
The dynamic young piano trio offers a program of works by Turina, Brahms (the Trio No. 3 in C Minor), and Paul Moravec ("Mood Swings"). (Walter Reade Theatre. 212-721-6500. Dec. 5 at 11 A.M.)

SIMON KEENLYSIDE
Keenlyside, whose pliant and powerful baritone was on rich display in last season's "Pélleas et Mélisande" at Carnegie Hall, returns to offer an afternoon of songs by Schubert, Brahms, Mahler, and Ravel ("Histoires Naturelles") at Alice Tully Hall. (212-721-6500. Dec. 5 at 2.)

MIDORI
The commanding violinist, with her longtime accompanist, Robert McDonald, takes the stage to play works for which she's renowned (the Debussy Sonata, Brahms's Third Sonata) along with more exotic fare by Janáček and Michael Hersh (the New York première of "The Wreckage of Flowers"). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 7 at 8.)

MARGARET MILLS
World-première works by Brian Fennelly and Francis Thorne, along with music by Brahms, Coates, and Chabrier, are featured on the pianist's program at Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall. (212-247-7800. Dec. 7 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

READINGS
Dec. 2 at 7:30: The judges of the Poetry Society of America's chapbook contest—Henri Cole, Robert Creeley, Mary Oliver, and Claudia Rankine—read with this year's winners. (Hemmerdinger Hall, New York University, 100 Washington Sq. E. For more information, call 212-254-9628.) ♦ Dec. 6 at 7:30: Greil Marcus and Sean Wilentz, the editors of "The Rose & the Briar: Death, Love and Liberty in the American Ballad," join Joyce Carol Oates, Luc Sante, and other contributors for an evening of stories and song. (New York Sociey for Ethical Culture, 2 W. 64th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Dec. 7 at 7: The novelist Nick Hornby reads from his new book, "The Polysyllabic Spree," and talks with the journalist and author Sarah Vowell. (Housing Works Used Book Café, 126 Crosby St. No tickets necessary.)

TALKS
Dec. 2 at 7: The photographers Leonard Freed, Paul Fusco, Bruce Gilden, Thomas Hoepker, and Eli Reed talk about their new book, "Magnum Stories." (Barnes & Noble, 33 E. 17th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Dec. 7 at 7: Robert Pinsky, Cynthia Ozick, Louise Glück, and others celebrate the hundredth issue of the literary quarterly *Threepenny Review*. (Hemmerdinger Hall, New York University, 100 Washington Sq. E. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Dec. 7 at 7: The counterterrorism expert Richard Clarke, the radio-show host and writer Amy Goodman, and the investigative journalist Greg Palast consider the state of the nation. (New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 W. 64th St., at Central Park W. No tickets necessary.)

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MOVIES OPENING

AFTER MIDNIGHT

A security guard at a cinema museum discovers a young woman in distress, in a romantic comedy directed by Davide Ferrario. In Italian. Opening Dec. 3. (Angelika Film Center and Metro Twin.)

THE ARYAN COUPLE

A drama directed by John Daly, in which a Jewish industrialist (Martin Landau) negotiates with the Third Reich for permission to resettle his household in Palestine. Opening Dec. 3. (Empire 25.)

CLOSER

Mike Nichols directed this adaptation of Patrick Marber's play, about four modern Londoners who become sexually entangled. With Julia Roberts, Jude Law, Natalie Portman, and Clive Owen. Opening Dec. 3.

CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE

A reporter (Jason Barry) investigates the suicide of a priest, in a thriller set in contemporary Ireland. Written and directed by John Deery. Opening Dec. 3. (Angelika Film Center.)

DESERTED STATION

Alireza Raisian directed this drama about a photographer and a young woman who become stranded while travelling to a remote Iranian village. In Farsi. Opening Dec. 3. (Quad Cinema.)

GAME OVER: KASPAROV AND THE MACHINE

Vikram Jayanti's documentary revisits the 1997 chess match between Garry Kasparov and I.B.M.'s Deep Blue. Opening Dec. 3. (Cinema Village.)

HOUSE OF FLYING DAGGERS

A new martial-arts film from Zhang Yimou, the director of "Hero." With Zhang Ziyi, Takeshi Kaneshiro, and Andy Lau. In Mandarin. Opening Dec. 3.

JESUS, YOU KNOW

Ulrich Seidl's documentary observes devout Catholics in the act of prayer. In German. Opening Dec. 3. (Village East Cinemas.)

FILM NOTES

ALEXANDER

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Battery Park 11, Cinema 1, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village East Cinemas.)

BAD EDUCATION

In an obscure parochial school in rural Spain, two young boys, Ignacio and Enrique, fell in love. But the boys were only eleven, and the affair was broken up by a priest and schoolmaster named Manolo. The priest, however, wasn't simply enforcing the rules. Father Manolo had already laid hands on Ignacio, a sweet-faced choirboy, and he wanted him entirely for himself. Pedro Almodóvar's extraordinary new movie, which is both a summary of his career and a deepening of his recent style, opens sixteen years after the affair, in 1980. Ignacio (Gael García Bernal), now a young actor, brings a manuscript to Enrique (Fele Martínez), who has become a well-known movie director in Madrid. The manuscript chronicles the boys' friendship and what happened to Ignacio—he became a drag queen and a blackmailer. We see the story enacted; later, Enrique turns it into a movie, and we see that being filmed, too, at which point the priest, now an ex-priest, shows up, and we hear his version of the events. The truth of what happened to the grownup Ignacio and Enrique emerges in pieces: the three narratives, as they expand and correct one another, become a trio of mirrors producing endless off-angle reflections. The movie asks: Is love possible between men, or is it possible only between innocent boys? In Spanish.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/22/04.) (Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE BIG CLOCK

In Kenneth Fearing's nitro-packed novel, the editor of a true-crime magazine must pretend to crack a murder case in which all the evidence points to himself; the real killer (he knows) is his publishing-tycoon boss. The director, John Farrow, and the screenwriter, Jonathan Latimer, bring the book tensely and vividly to life with deft casting (Ray Milland as the editor, Charles Laughton as the publisher), memorable symbols (such as a lethal sundial), and acute observation. They capture a cushy level of the rat race in such bits as (to quote from James Agee's review) "an editorial conference, caught the split second before an hour's boring tension relaxes, with adjournment." Elsa Lanchester steals scenes as a neglected artist; George Macready nearly steals the movie as Laughton's flinty right-hand man. Released in 1948.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; Dec. 2.)

DODSWORTH

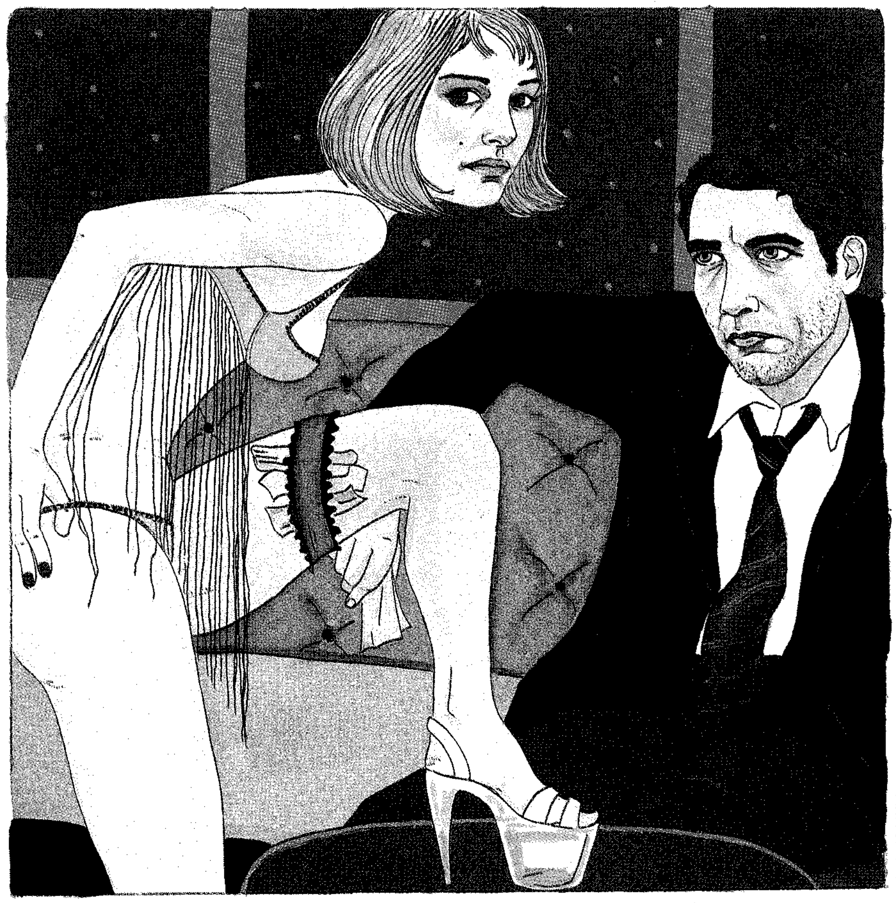
While other writers were turning out novels ridiculing American materialism and glorifying the expatriate existence, Sinclair Lewis conceived a businessman hero and showed him to be a true dreamer, while his culture-mad wife, longing to be enriched by life in Europe, was a foolish horror. Sidney Howard made a play of Lewis's novel, and Walter Huston gave a legendary performance as the hero. He also stars in the movie version, which was produced by Sam Goldwyn with great care and taste; William Wyler is the director. There's only one trouble, really, but it's central: Sidney Howard also did the screenplay, and the movie follows the stage version too closely. It looks programmed and underpopulated, though in an elegantly stylized way. Released in 1936.—*Pauline Kael* (Museum of Modern Art; Dec. 5.)

FINDING NEVERLAND

Marc Forster, the director who brought us "Monster's Ball," has turned his attention—as one does—from Halle Berry to J. M. Barrie. The diminutive Scottish author is played by Johnny Depp, in a loose fantasia on the genesis of "Peter Pan." Barrie meets some young boys in a London park, and from his friendship with them and their widowed mother (Kate Winslet) he conjures a story of a child who cannot, or will not, grow up. The fact that the film takes liberties with the historical record (there were five brothers, for instance, not four) is a minor affair; more misguided is the reliance on whimsy, at moments where the real Barrie was straightforward, even chilly, in his imaginings. At other times, however, the movie's air of slightness and evanescence feels touching and right, and, if the result strikes you as too weepy for its own good, consider that the actual story of Barrie and his "Lost Boys"—some of whom met untimely deaths—was worse and more troubling by far. With Julie Christie, Dustin Hoffman, and, in the role of a real Peter, the clear and unsentimental Freddie Highmore.—*Anthony Lane* (Battery Park 11, Cinema 1, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

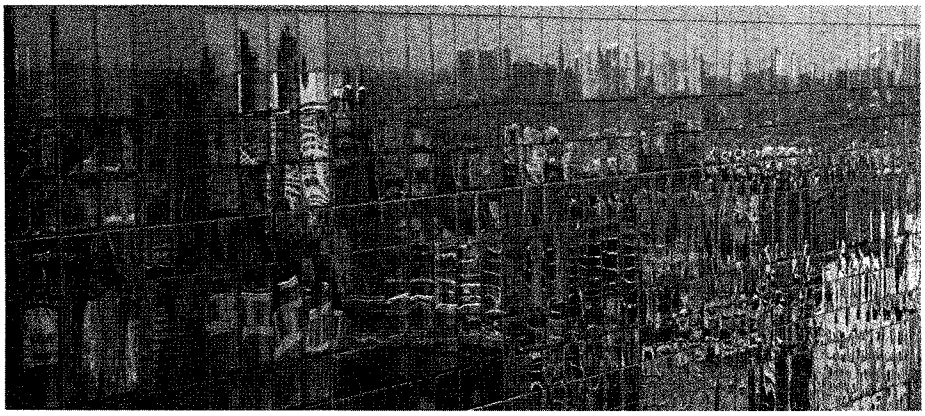
THE INCREDIBLES

A shiny new project from Pixar, sprinting in the footsteps of "Toy Story." Bob and Helen Parr are retired superheroes, raising their suspiciously gifted children in the suburbs. Bob, stuck in an office job, is lured back into the fray; being a lunk, he stumbles into a trap, and Helen, being a wife, has the guts and



LARA TOMLIN

Natalie Portman and Clive Owen in "Closer," opening December 3.



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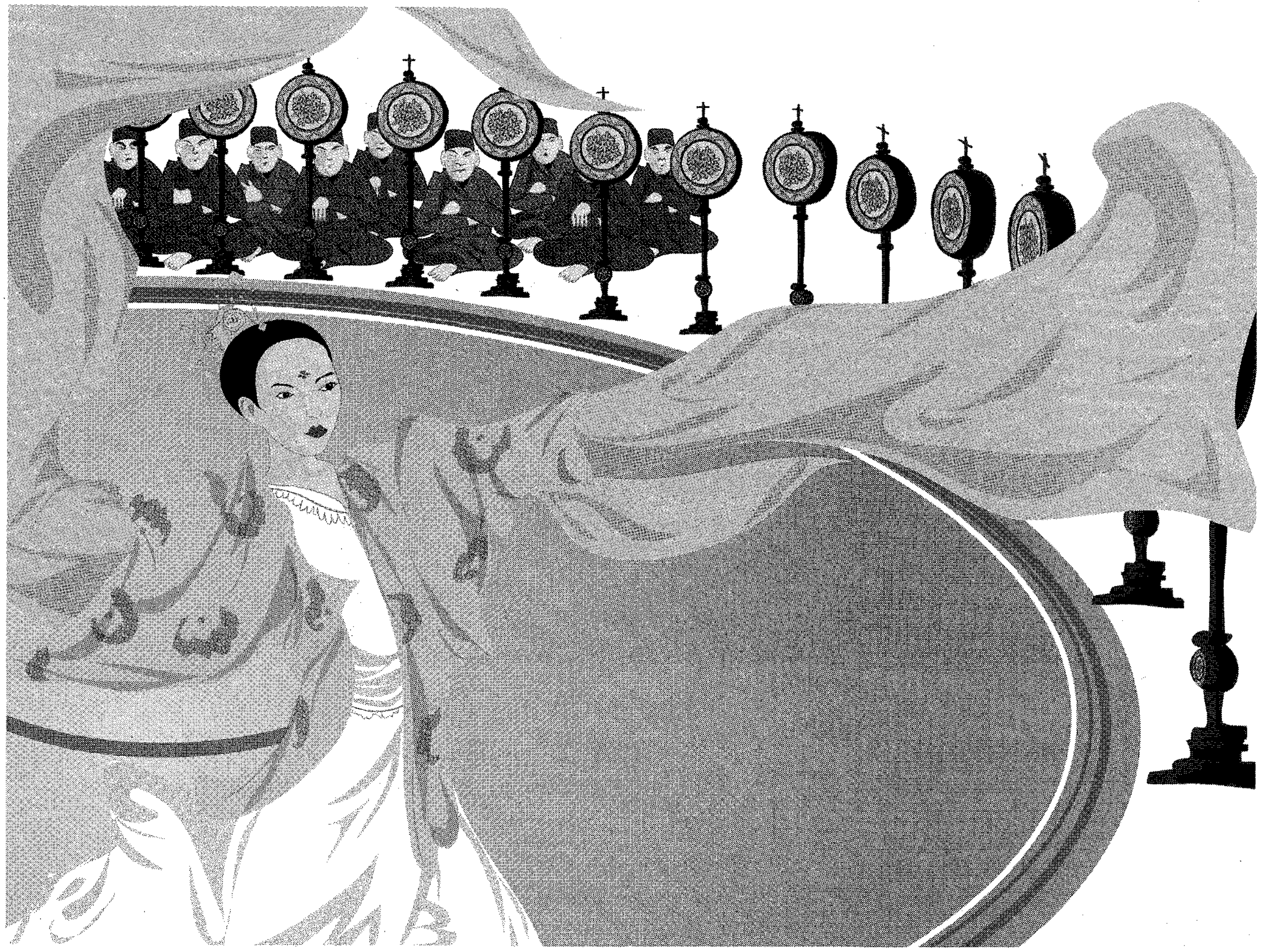


Zhang Ziyi in a dance scene from "House of Flying Daggers," a martial-arts film directed by Zhang Yimou opening Dec. 3.

MAXIMILIAN BODE

initiative to set out and rescue him. The movie, written and directed by Brad Bird, is a smart compound of shameless visual exaggeration (Bob's muscle tone alone is a special effect) and a touchingly unhip reliance on emotional realism. Instead of giggling references to other movies, we get snatches of ordinary family bickering, plus a distinct air of nineteen-fifties innocence—quite a fillip, given that many computer-animated movies pride themselves on technological progress and nothing else. The main voice-overs are delivered by Craig T. Nelson, Samuel L. Jackson, and—most winning of all—Holly Hunter.—*A.L.* (11/15/04) (Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

KINSEY

Liam Neeson, his hair standing straight up like tensed wire, is the dauntless but neurotic sex researcher Alfred C. Kinsey in this vivacious and witty—even naughty—bio-pic, written and directed by Bill Condon. The movie covers Kinsey's entire adult life (with flashbacks to his boyhood), including his marriage to Clara McMillen (Laura Linney) and his relations with the much younger men—Clyde Martin (Peter Sarsgaard), Wardell Pomeroy (Chris O'Donnell), and Paul Gebhardt (Timothy Hutton)—who became, at Indiana University in the forties and fifties, the principal assistants on Kinsey's revolutionary books about male and female sexuality. At the movie's heart is a surprisingly entertaining sequence devoted to the team's interviewing technique, a method of nonjudgmental inquiry that causes hundreds of thousands of subjects to open up and confess, with the result that behavior that had been isolated in the past as "deviant" or "perverted" came to seem like relatively common occurrences on the spectrum of human sexuality. Eager to sympathize and understand everyone, Kinsey the liberator plunges into gay bars, homosexual relationships, and once-a-philosopher-twice-a-pervert masochistic practices. Condon presents him as a genuine hero who drove himself into semi-madness and exhaustion, a sacrificial figure who died for our pleasure. With John Lithgow and Oliver Platt. Cinematography by Frederick Elmes.—*D.D.* (11/29/04) (Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.)

KISS OF DEATH

A tense, terrifying New York crime melodrama, with an unusually authentic seamy atmosphere; the director, Henry Hathaway, brought his crew in from Hollywood and shot the entire film on location in such places as a Harlem night club, a house in Queens, the Criminal Courts Building, the Tombs, and Sing Sing. Victor Mature gives an unexpectedly subdued, convincing performance as a hoodlum convict who, for the sake of his children (their mother has committed suicide), agrees to work with the police as an informer. Richard Widmark, in his film début, created a sensation; he's a giggling, sadistic gunman with homicidal mania in his voice, and when he grins his white teeth are more alarming than fangs. Released in 1947.—*P.K.* (Film Forum; Dec. 7.)

THE MOTORCYCLE DIARIES

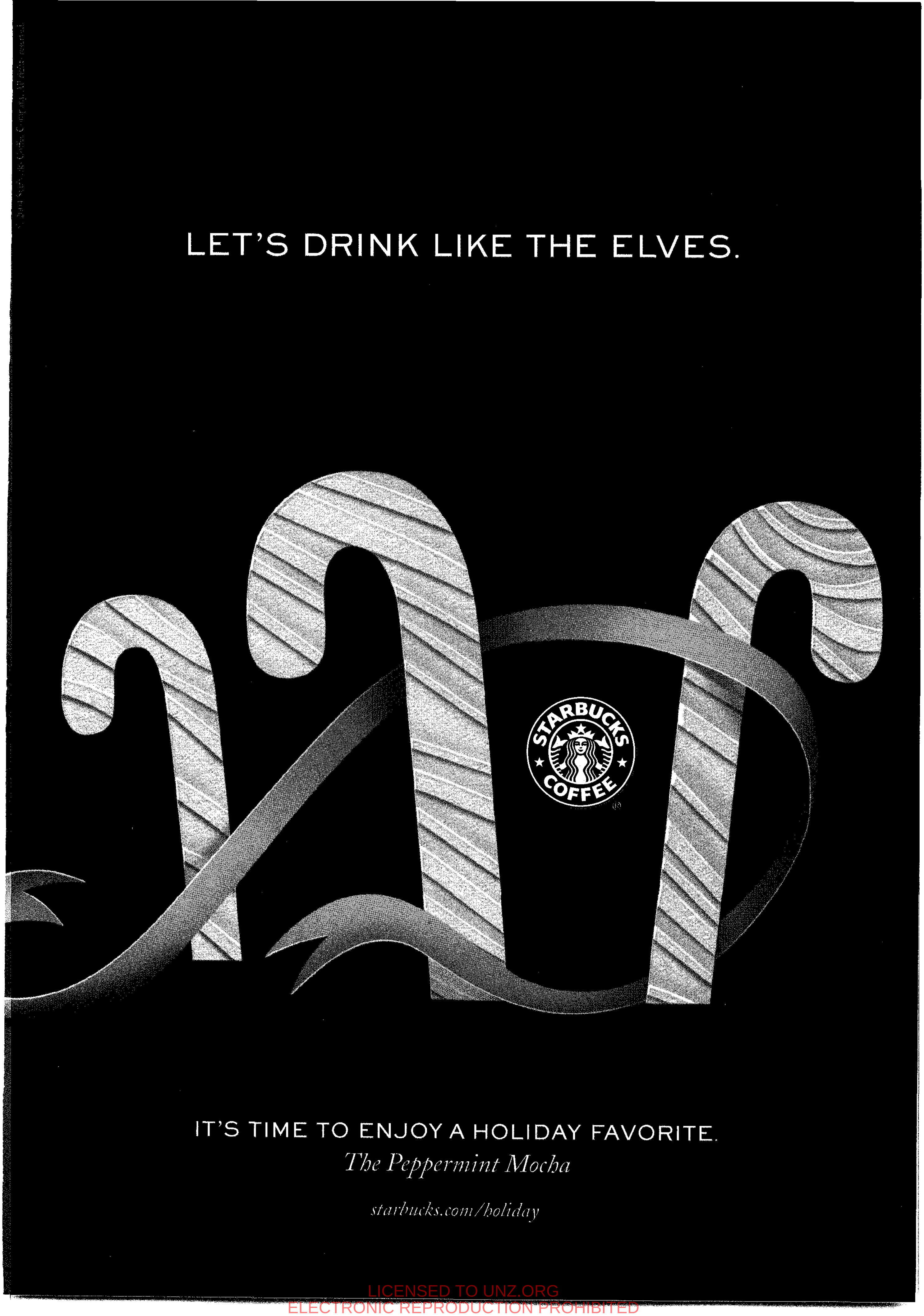
In 1952, a medical student called Ernesto Guevara de la Serna (Gael García Bernal) teamed up with his friend Alberto Granado (Rodrigo de la Serna), a biochemist, and journeyed eight thousand miles through South America. The tale of their travels is the basis for Walter Salles's ravishing, suggestive, and faintly superfluous film. Both young men are of middle-class Argentinean stock, and Ernesto has a girlfriend so rich and beautiful that her family's estate, as Alberto notes, looks like Switzerland. If he had stayed with her, Latin-American history might have taken a more placid turn; instead, Ernesto remounted his motorbike, headed into the Andes, and began the determined process of turning into Che Guevara. The film is sprinkled with gestures toward that future, especially when the two men work at a leper colony on the Amazon, but the foreshadowing doesn't always convince; the sequence in which they meet a pair of wandering Communists on the road and drink in the saga of their suffering is biographically accurate, yet it feels dramatically forced. In the end, the film might best be read as a high-class, episodic buddy picture, with the tubby, more skeptical Alberto (he's like a young Robert Donat) observing with interest the spark of indignation—and the air of chaste reticence—in his impossibly handsome pal.—*A.L.* (9/27/04) (Empire 25, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Sunshine Cinema.)

NATIONAL TREASURE

A somewhat entertaining treasure-hunt movie—suspension of disbelief required. Nicolas Cage stars as an explorer out to find some buried riches left behind by the Founding Fathers. The would-be crackling dialogue is damply delivered, but there's fun to be had in the director Jon Turteltaub's constantly shifting monument locations (from Washington, D.C., to Philadelphia) and the puzzle-work clues that move the plot. The film is playfully pointless.—*Bruce Diones* (Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

THE POLAR EXPRESS

Chris Van Allsburg's twenty-nine-page picture book about a young boy's travels to the North Pole to meet Santa Claus gets an expanded, expensive retelling in Robert Zemeckis's Christmas bauble. The film is a hybrid of sorts—a computer-animated movie filmed with live actors in a process called "performance capture." This technique makes for a gorgeous holiday card (the digital backgrounds twinkle and shine), but the look of the "captured" characters is something of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a disappointment. Tom Hanks (in a number of roles) and the other actors do a nice job of voicing their parts, but the waxy animated faces they've been given are off-putting. It's a bit like watching mannequins act. (The movie is also playing in 3-D at selected IMAX theaters, where the wow quotient improves considerably.)—*B.D.* (Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.)

RAY

Swaying from side to side, his back arched almost to the point of snapping, Jamie Foxx, as Ray Charles, seems pulled upward to the heavens and downward to the keys at the same time. This intelligent and tough-minded bio-pic, written by James L. White and Taylor Hackford and directed by Hackford, tells us a lot about Charles, but it doesn't tell us everything. Though properly awed by Charles's talent, "Ray" refuses to get chummy or possessive. The movie picks up Charles's story in the late forties, when he's an ambitious but wary teen-age musician, and carries him through his musical innovations and his personal pleasures and torments until 1964, when he's a world-famous artist and a miserable heroin addict. There's something both joyous and demonic about this guy, an insatiable energy in his insistence on driving soul and country sounds into the beats of R. & B. For many older people in the audience, the sound of Ray Charles's music is inseparable from memories of dating, dancing, lovemaking, and loss. The movie has the bold good grace to honor the enraptured kids they once were and the sterner but still hungry grownups they became.—*D.D.* (11/8/04) (Battery Park 11, Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

SIDEWAYS

Paul Giamatti has no chin to speak of, a round-shouldered physique, and the nervous smile of a craven dog. He's the anti-ideal of the American male, and he's making a brilliant career of it. In this wonderful movie by the team of Alexander Payne (writer-director) and Jim Taylor (co-writer), Giamatti plays Miles, a failed novelist around forty who takes off for a wine-tasting tour with his buddy Jack (Thomas Haden Church), a washed-up TV actor who is about to get married. What starts as a last fling at freedom becomes for the two men—but centrally for Miles—a confrontation with middle age and stasis. Miles is a bibliophile, a cinephile, and an oenophile. Jack, however, couldn't care less—in every way, he's blissfully undiscriminating. On the road, the men meet Maya (Virginia Madsen), a divorced graduate student who works as a waitress, and Stephanie (Sandra Oh), a sexy "pour girl." The music and the camera setups are at times pedestrian, but the rest of "Sideways" is vivid and bitterly funny.—*D.D.* (10/25/04) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

THE SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS MOVIE

Nickelodeon's smash cartoon series gets a splashy sendoff in its first feature film. SpongeBob, his dim-witted sidekick, Patrick, his employer, Mr. Krabs, and the other residents of the undersea community Bikini Bottom appear in vibrant color, ready for another wacky adventure. The story line has SpongeBob passed over for a promotion, while King Neptune's crown (he wears it to hide his baldness) is stolen and Mr. Krabs is framed. As the squeaky-voiced hero sets out to right the wrongs, lessons are learned and audiences entertained. Stephen Hillenburg does a terrific job adapting his nautical toon for the screen: its fizzy animation pops, and there are some excellent musical moments (Wilco, the Flaming Lips) that buoy the action.—*B.D.* (Battery Park 11, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

ALSO PLAYING

I ♥ HUCKABEES (10/4/04)
Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.

NOTRE MUSIQUE
Film Forum.

VERA DRAKE (10/11/04)
Angelika Film Center, Cinema 2, Empire 25, and Lincoln Square.

A VERY LONG ENGAGEMENT
Paris and Sunshine Cinema.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 11, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (212-924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (212-398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Twin, Broadway at 99th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 66th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
Pioneer Theatre, 155 E. 3rd St. (212-254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182).
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Dec. 12: "Fort Lee: The Film Town." Dec. 4 at 2: "The Light in the Dark" (1920, Clarence Brown). ♦ Dec. 4 at 4: "The Fighting Blade" (1923, John S. Robertson). ♦ Dec. 5 at 2: "Santa Lucia Luntana" (1932, Angelo de Vito) and "The Golf Specialist" (1930, Monte Brice). ♦ Dec. 5 at 4: "Victims of Persecution" (1933, Bud Pollard). ♦ Repertory nights. Dec. 4-5 at 6:30: "Ran" (1985, Akira Kurosawa; in Japanese).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5110)—Through Dec. 8: The New York African Diaspora Film Festival. For a complete schedule, see www.nyadff.org. ♦ Dec. 2 at 8: "Over Urban Land" (2004, François Boué). ♦ New work by James Fotopoulos. Dec. 3 at 7 and 9:15: "Families" (2002). ♦ Dec. 4 at 7 and 9: "The Nest" (2003). ♦ Dec. 5 at 7 and 9: "Esophagus" (2004). ♦ "Essential Cinema." Dec. 4 at 5: "Zéro de Conduite" (1933, Jean Vigo). ♦ Dec. 5 at 5: "Eat" (1963, Andy Warhol) and three other shorts.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—A Luchino Visconti retrospective. All films are in Italian. Dec. 1-2 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Senso" (1954). ♦ Dec. 3 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "White Nights" (1957). ♦ Dec. 4-5 at 2, 5:30, and 9: "The Damned" (1969). ♦ Dec. 6-7 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Sandra" (1965).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through Dec. 23: "Essential Noir." Dec. 1 at 1, 4:35, and 8:10: "Gun Crazy" (1949, Joseph H. Lewis). ♦ Dec. 1 at 2:45, 6:20, and 9:55: "They Live by Night" (1949, Nicholas Ray). ♦ Dec. 2 at 1:40, 5:20, and 9:10: "The Lost Weekend" (1945, Billy Wilder). ♦ Dec. 2 at 3:30 and 7:20: "The Big Clock" (†). ♦ Dec. 3-4 at 1:30, 5:20, and 9:10: "The Killing" (1956, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ Dec. 3-4 at 3:10 and 7: "The Asphalt Jungle" (1950, John Huston). ♦ Dec. 5-6 at 1:15, 4:40, and 8:05: "Phantom Lady" (1944, Robert Siodmak). ♦ Dec. 5-6 at 3, 6:25, and 9:50: "Laura" (1944, Otto Preminger). ♦ Dec. 7 at 1:05, 4:35, and 8:05: "Kiss of Death" (†). ♦ Dec. 7 at 3, 6:30, and 10: "Pickup on South Street" (1953, Samuel Fuller).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL

55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Dec. 21: "Sisters: Dorléac and Deneuve." Dec. 7 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Time Regained" (1997, Raul Ruiz; in French).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—Through Jan. 31: "Premières," new films and recent restorations. Dec. 1 at 6:15: "La Chambre des Magiciennes" (2000, Claude Miller; in French). ♦ Dec. 1 at 8:15 and Dec. 4 at 2: "Trilogy—the Weeping Meadow" (2004, Theo Angelopoulos). ♦ Dec. 1 at 8:30: "Monograph in Stereo" (2004, Darrin Martin) and other shorts. ♦ Dec. 2 at 5 and Dec. 4 at 5:30: "Moments Choisis des Histoire(s) du Cinéma" (2004, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). ♦ Dec. 2 at 6:15: "Sandra" (1965, Luchino Visconti; in Italian). ♦ Dec. 2 at 8: "Embedded in Baghdad" (2003, Alexandre Trudeau). ♦ Dec. 2 at 8:30: "Uniform" (2004, Diao Yi'nan; in Mandarin). ♦ Dec. 3 at 6:15: "Kamikaze 1989" (1981, Wolf Gremm). ♦ Dec. 3 at 8: "Top Spot" (2004, Tracey Emin). ♦ Dec. 3 at 8:30 and Dec. 5 at 2: "Chased by Dreams" (2004, Buddhadeb Dasgupta; in Hindi). ♦ Dec. 4 at 2:30: "Le Grand Littoral" (2003, Valérie Jouve) and three other shorts. ♦ Dec. 4 at 7:30: "Whisky" (2003, Juan Pablo Rebella and Pablo Stoll). ♦ Dec. 4 at 8: "Three Transitions" (1973, Peter Campus) and six other shorts. ♦ Dec. 5 at 2:30: "Wild Boy" (2004, Guy Ben Ner) and three other shorts. ♦ Dec. 5 at 4:30: "Twelve Chairs" (2004, Ulrike Ottinger). ♦ Dec. 6 at 8: "The Diary of a Chambermaid" (1946, Jean Renoir). ♦ "112 Years of Cinema," one film from each year of moving-image history. Dec. 3 and Dec. 6 at 5: "Blacksmithing Scene" (1893, Edison Company) and "The Shamrock Handicap" (1926, John Ford). ♦ Dec. 5 at 6: "Dodsworth" (†). ♦ Dec. 6 at 7:30: "Hymn to Her" (1974, Stan Brakhage) and "The Learning Tree" (1969, Gordon Parks).

SUNSHINE CINEMA

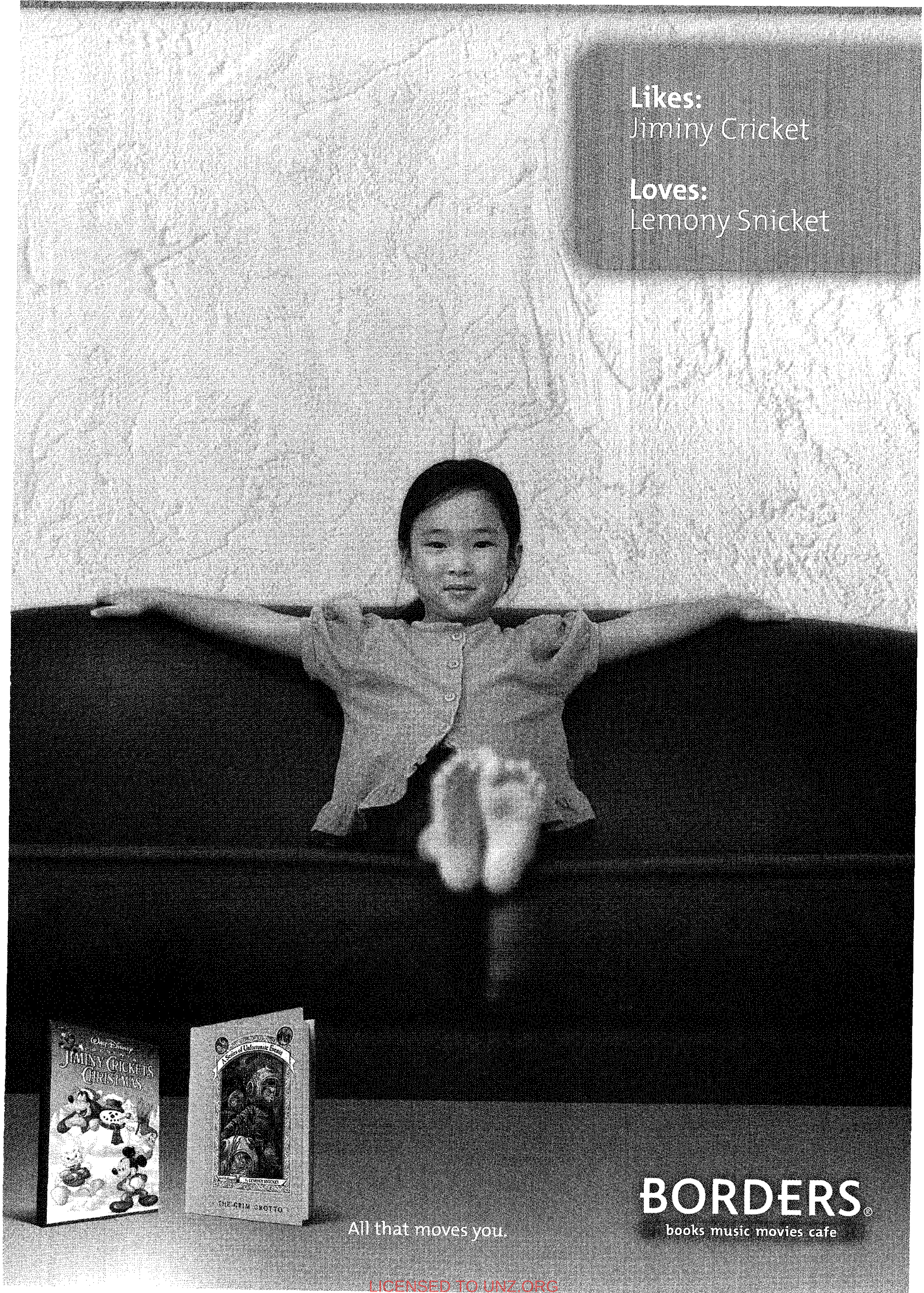
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—Midnight movies. Dec. 3-4: "Beyond the Valley of the Dolls" (1970, Russ Meyer).

THALIA THEATRE

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Children's movies. Dec. 4 at 11 A.M. and 2: "The Secret of NIMH" (1982, Don Bluth).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through Dec. 7: "The Newest Tiger: Sixty Years of South Korean Cinema." Dec. 1 at 1 and 8: "Declaration of Fools" (1983, Lee Chang-ho). ♦ Dec. 2 at 1 and 8: "Ardor" (2002, Byun Young-joo). ♦ Dec. 3 at 1:30 and 6:15: "Jealousy Is My Middle Name" (2002, Park Chan-ok). ♦ Dec. 3 at 4 and 8:45: "The Turning Gate" (2002, Hong Sang-soo). ♦ Dec. 4 at 2 and Dec. 7 at 1: "Silmido" (2003, Kang Woo-suk). ♦ Dec. 4 at 4:30: "Why Has Bodhi Dharma Left for the East?" (1989, Bae Yong-kyan). ♦ Dec. 5 at 1 and 7:15: "Chilsu and Mansu" (1988, Park Kwang-su). ♦ Dec. 5 at 3 and 9:20: "The Man with Three Coffins" (1987, Lee Chang-ho). ♦ Dec. 5 at 5 and Dec. 6 at 6: "Asako in Ruby Shoes" (2000, EJ Yong). ♦ Dec. 7 at 3:40 and 8:15: "Chunhyang" (2000, Im Kwon-taek). ♦ Special event. Dec. 4 at 7:30: "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind" (2004, Michel Gondry), followed by an interview with the film's screenwriter, Charlie Kaufman.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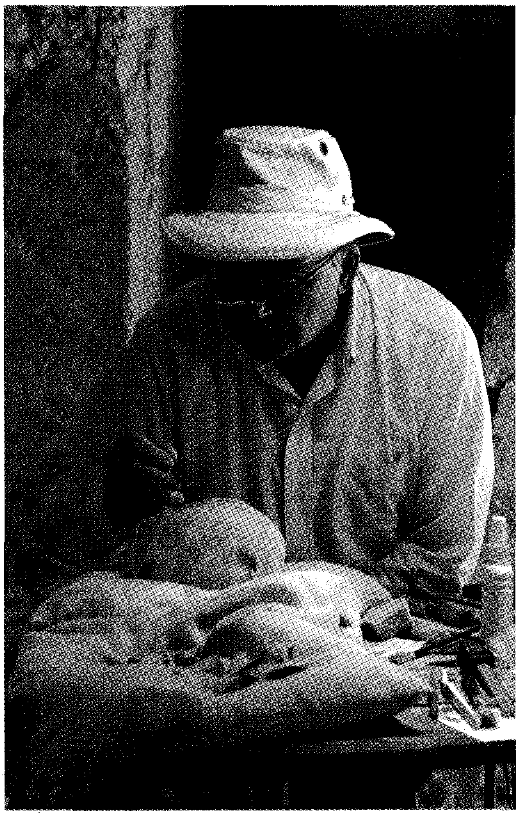
RAMESES: WRATH OF GOD OR MAN?

BY NAO HAUSER

"It was the skull that triggered the whole story," Anthony Geffen recalls. "We were sitting in a pub with Kent Weeks, this amazing Egyptologist, and he was telling us about a three-thousand-year-old skull he had found in KV 5, the tomb of Rameses II's sons. We realized how the artifact potentially connected us with so much—with Exodus in the Bible, with the way ancient Egyptians lived, and with the fascinating work Kent was doing, with the latest forensic technology to give the skull a face."



Kent Weeks, Professor of Egyptology at American University in Cairo, is also the director of the Theban Mapping Project responsible for unearthing the largest tomb in the Valley of the Kings and documenting the archeological heritage of the important Thebes West Bank region.

Geffen, a London filmmaker ("The Assassination of King Tut") and CEO of Atlantic Productions, was accompanied by Jack Smith, an executive producer of the Discovery Channel. For Kent Weeks their interest meant that Discovery Channel would help solve the problem: Was the skull that of Amen-her-khepesh-ef, the firstborn son of Rameses II, the pharaoh linked to the Exodus? Because if it was, the skull would raise some intriguing questions. The pharoah's firstborn son could not have been a child at the time of his death as has been previously assumed. Rather he was probably a middle-aged military commander killed by a blow to the head, most likely from a mace, the kind of club then used in battle.

Did this evidence contradict the events narrated in Exodus, in particular the killing of the firstborn Egyptian son? No, says Weeks, who believes that it only makes us reconsider what we do and do not know. The Bible and the Koran say they killed the "firstborn" sons, but perhaps we read too much into that when we assume that the firstborn were young children when they died. Rameses II lived to about ninety, so his firstborn son could have been middle-aged at the time of his death. And as for his having been killed in battle, well, neither the Bible nor the Koran tell us how the sons were killed.

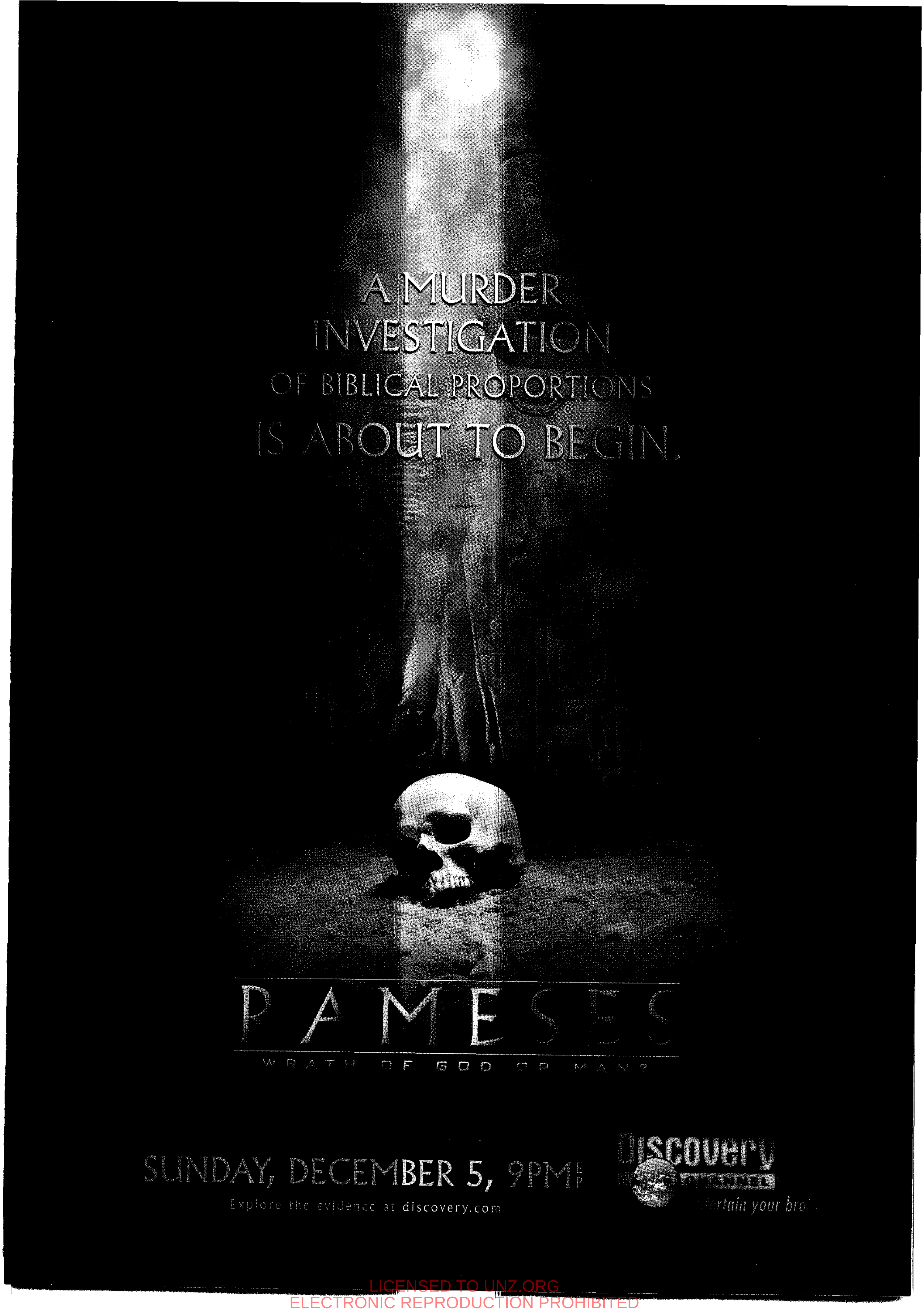
> **"The discovery of the skull raised some intriguing questions. Among them—was the unearthed artifact that of the firstborn son of Rameses II, the pharaoh linked to the Exodus?"**

In fact, what do we really know about the time of Exodus or what happened during the sixty-seven-year reign of Rameses II? Seeking answers for the filming of **Rameses: Wrath of God or Man?**, which premières on Sunday, December 5th, 9–11 P.M. (ET/PT), Discovery Channel producers teamed up with Charles Sennott, Boston *Globe* journalist and award-winning Middle East news correspondent. "Charlie became our sleuth. We followed him all over Egypt as he talked to the experts on Biblical history, archaeology, theology, and even volcanic activity," Geffen relates. "We climbed Mount Sinai with all the equipment loaded on pack animals. Then we went across the desert to look at Pi-Rameses, the lost city built by Rameses II. In the Cairo Museum we filmed Rameses' mummy, which was like meeting him because he's so well preserved."

To recreate what has not been preserved, Geffen brought together a cast of hundreds in Tunis, including special-effects experts, Atlantic Digital, who had worked on "The Matrix" and "The Lord of the Rings." Sets were built to depict the events of Exodus and the life of Rameses II. "We didn't want Hollywood glamorization," Geffen says. "We needed accuracy, so we went to ancient wall carvings and paintings to find out what kind of wigs they wore, what makeup, what jewelry." The most complicated part, he says, was the chariots: "We hired Moroccan drivers who had worked on 'Gladiator,' but we had to retrain them for two months on the Egyptian chariots because they only knew the Roman ones."

Geffen still shakes sand from his pocket occasionally, a souvenir of what he calls the eleventh plague, a devastating Sahara sandstorm. "We were shooting scenes for the 'ten plagues' and suddenly the storm plunged us into darkness several hours at a time over two days. It destroyed the sets, which took four weeks to rebuild."

Yet what Geffen remembers most vividly and what continues to haunt him, is being inside the tomb with Weeks: "when they lifted the skull and I came face to face with what may be the firstborn son of Rameses II, who might have been killed by a mortal in battle—or slain by the hand of God."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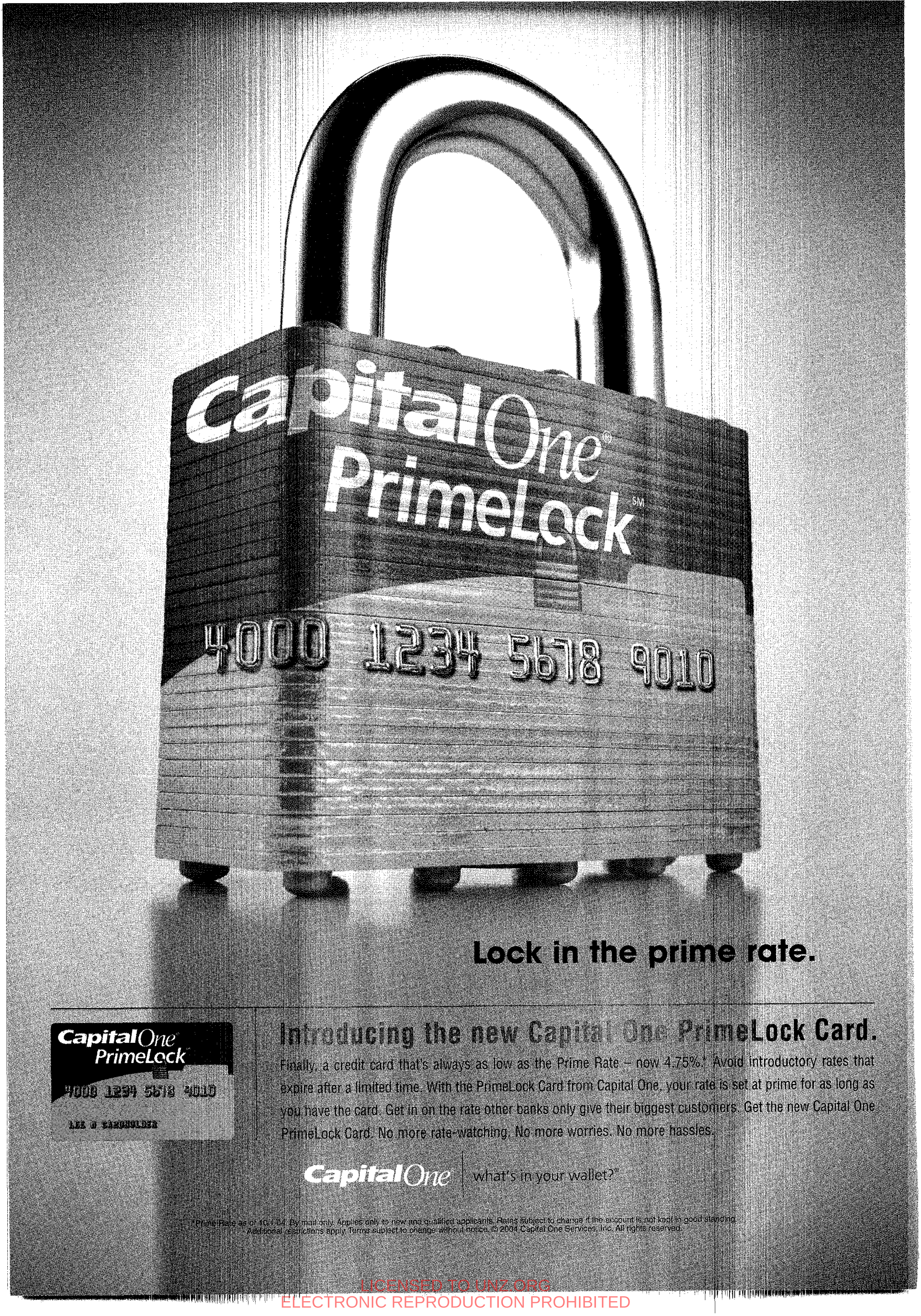
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THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
GOING DOWN

Americans long ago became accustomed to the pleasing notion that there is nothing quite so sound as the dollar. During the nineteen-twenties and thirties, when Pound, Hemingway, and Stein were in Paris, they lived on modest remittances from home which, translated into francs, bankrolled lazy afternoons in the Jardin du Luxembourg and giddy evenings on the Boulevard Montparnasse. "Two people, then, could live comfortably and well in Europe on five dollars a day and could travel," Hemingway wrote. Near the end of the Second World War, an international conference in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, confirmed the American currency's role as the linchpin of the global economy, setting up a system of fixed exchange rates that survived for almost thirty years, and ushering in an age of unprecedented international prosperity. John Maynard Keynes, the leader of the British delegation, acknowledged the new economic reality. He and his fellow-Brits might have the brains, he is said to have commented, but the Americans had the money.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

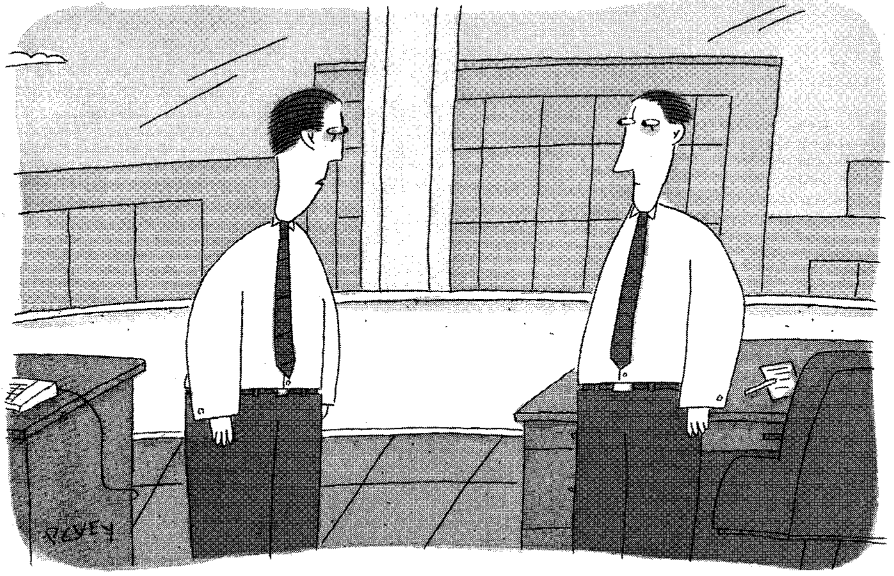
Not anymore, as anybody who has visited Europe recently will confirm. Five dollars for a cup of coffee, a hundred dollars for a mediocre meal, three hundred dollars for a modest hotel room—if Hemingway had been forced to pay such prices, Paris would loom less large in the history of American letters.

Since the nineteen-seventies, the dollar's value has been determined in the financial markets, where traders buy and sell currencies like any other commodity. In the past few weeks, the dollar has fallen sharply. The depreciation reflects two intractable, and related, problems. First, as manufacturing and production have shifted to countries with low labor costs, the trade balance has declined alarmingly: America cannot sell as much abroad as it buys. Second, the United States has emerged as the world's biggest debtor. Ten years ago, the country ran a modest trade deficit (less than a hundred billion dollars), and, as a consequence of investments that Americans made overseas, the rest of the world owed us trillions of dollars. Today, the trade deficit is about five per cent of the gross domestic product—bigger than it has ever been—and we owe the rest of the world about three and a quarter trillion dollars.

Running a trade deficit and borrowing from abroad, even borrowing heavily, aren't necessarily bad things. Many developing nations do so because they don't have enough capital to invest in industrial equipment, education, and infrastructure. But the United States isn't a developing nation, and it isn't borrowing to finance investment: it is taking on debt to finance the government's day-to-day expenses, and to pay for imported consumer goods, such as autos, toys, and electronics.

The dollar's fall, along with the trade and budget deficits, is a classic symptom of a country living beyond its means. Twenty years ago, American households saved about nine cents of every dollar they earned; today, they save less than a penny. The federal government is spending about four hundred billion dollars a year more than it raises in taxes, which means that the Treasury has to sell about thirty-four billion dollars' worth of bonds every month to remain solvent. By far the biggest purchasers of Treasury bonds are the central banks of China and Japan, which, last year alone, accumulated some four hundred billion dollars' worth of them. Since the purchases were made in dollars, they also provided much needed support for the currency.

Hardly coincidentally, China and Japan run the biggest trade surpluses with the United States. To maintain export-led growth in their own countries, both governments have been financing the American budget deficit and preventing their currencies from appreciating against the dollar. Some observers have



"We're giving up for the holidays."

• •

labelled this arrangement a "new Bretton Woods"—we import consumer goods from Asia, and they lend us the money to pay for them, at fixed exchange rates. The system worked for a while, but, at some point, all countries have to pay their own way, which means restoring the trade balance and paying down debts. One way to do this is to cut back on imports by reducing consumer spending, but this would probably require a recession. The only other option is to devalue the currency, which makes imports more expensive and exports cheaper.

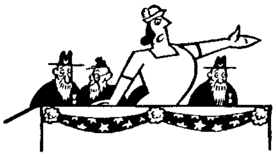
In recent weeks, John Snow, the Treasury Secretary, and Alan Greenspan, the Federal Reserve Board chairman, have made statements that can be interpreted as attempts to devalue the dollar. Not surprisingly, their comments prompted more selling on the foreign-exchange markets. But debasing the dollar is a high-risk strategy. Currency movements tend to be self-reinforcing. If traders come to see the dollar as a one-way bet, its slide could turn into a rout. During the past decade, record trade deficits, soaring foreign debts, and prolonged fiscal irresponsibility presaged full-blown currency crises in Mexico, Russia, Brazil, and many other countries. The crises eventually erupted when foreign investors rushed to get their money out of the stricken countries. If that were to occur here, the Federal Reserve would be forced to raise interest rates in order to stop the panic selling, which, in turn, would torpedo the stock and the real-estate markets. The economy would be plunged into a deep recession.

Given the dollar's unique status as an internationally accepted means of exchange, many economists doubted that such a catastrophe could befall the United States. Now they are not so sure. Russia just announced that its central bank might change some of its dollar reserves into euros, and rumors persist that Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern oil producers will soon begin to set oil prices in euros, a move that would undermine the dollar's privileged status. Most ominously, the Bush Administration has alienated some of the dollar's biggest supporters by trying to deflect responsibility for America's growing financial dependency onto China and other low-cost producers. Last week, Li Ruogu, the deputy governor of the People's Bank of China, told the *Financial Times*, "China's custom is that we never blame others for our own problem. The United States has the reverse attitude. Whenever they have a problem they blame others."

Ultimately, the value of a currency is an international verdict on the honesty and competence of the government that issued it. President Bush may have recovered in the domestic polls, but in the currency markets his ratings are still falling. And, with his Administration determined to pursue further tax cuts and costly Social Security privatization, his numbers don't seem likely to turn around soon.

—*John Cassidy*

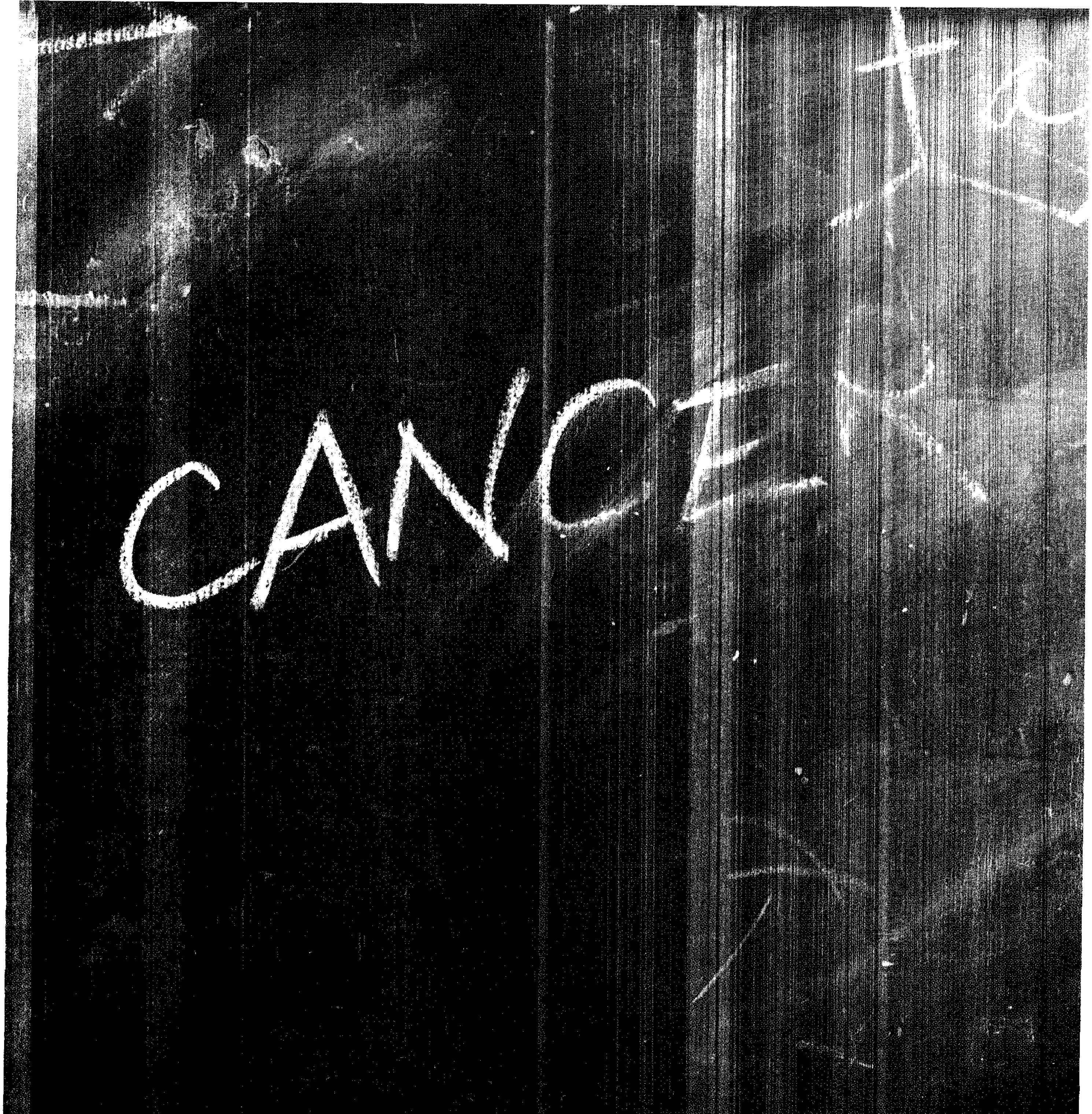
THE CULTURE WARS
WHY KNOW?



When Judith Reisman and Eunice Van Winkle Ray lectured together recently in Nashville, Mrs. Ray was introduced by her husband, Colonel Ronald Ray, who grabbed the audience's attention by announcing that the United States "lost the most important war of the twentieth century." He was referring not to Vietnam, where he served, but to the sexual revolution. "Many of us are casualties of the sexual revolution," he said cryptically. Mrs. Ray then took the lectern and presented an overview, complete with charts, of our current state of sexual degeneracy: the repeal of laws against abortion, adultery, fornication, and even sodomy. All of this they trace back to the work of one man: Alfred Kinsey.

The recent release of "Kinsey," a film about the famous mid-century sex researcher, has made this a busy time for the anti-Kinsey movement. Most Americans no longer give much thought to Kinsey as a societal force, but his detractors believe that his significance can hardly be overstated. A recent newsletter of the abstinence-education group Why kNOw? compared the publication of "The Kinsey Report," in 1948, to the attacks of September 11th, and labelled Kinseyism "fifty years of cultural terrorism."

Judith Reisman is the founder of the modern anti-Kinsey movement. She spent a week in Washington, D.C., recently, talking to people on Capitol Hill about opening a congressional investigation into Kinsey's work. The new film, she said, is "deceptive and malevolently misleading, to say the least." A sixty-nine-year-old independent researcher with a Ph.D. in communications and a former songwriter for Captain Kangaroo, Reisman is the president of the Institute for Media Education and the lead author of "Kinsey, Sex and Fraud" and "Kinsey: Crimes and



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Consequences." In one article, Reisman describes Kinsey as "a scientific and moral fraud, a certifiable sexual psychopath as well as a sadomasochistic pornography addict and a sexually harassing bully." Though largely unknown outside social-conservative circles, Reisman has been influential within them. She has served as a consultant to the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services and was given seven hundred and thirty-four thousand dollars by Ronald Reagan's Justice Department to study pornography. More recently, she has been active in the rise of abstinence-only education; in June, her colleagues gave her an Abstie Award for lifetime achievement. Last week, Reisman testified at a congressional hearing about the dangers of pornography addiction, saying that police should be required to collect evidence of pornography consumption at any crime scene.

"Dr. Kinsey's most egregious fraud is that he wasn't a scientist," Reisman said the other day. "He was an ideologue who was most importantly a sex offender at best, and, beyond being a sex offender, he was certainly a child sexual abuser and/or solicitor and guide in the perpetration of that abuse." At the root of this accusation is an interview that Kinsey conducted with a sexual predator who kept detailed records of his activities with hundreds of women, men, and children.

But it is not simply Kinsey's neutrality toward such people that upsets Reisman. She claims that Kinsey actively solicited pedophiles to molest children and report back to him. In fact, she said, "there is absolutely no reason to believe that Kinsey himself was not involved in the sexual abuse of these children." (None of Kinsey's four biographers have turned up any evidence that he was.) Reisman also believes that Kinsey died not from heart failure but from what she calls "brutal, repetitive self-abuse."

To a reader of Reisman's scholarly papers, it sometimes appears that there is little for which she does not hold Kinsey responsible. In her research on gays, for instance, she has written that the "recruitment techniques" of homosexuals rival those of the Marine Corps. The Kinsey paradigm, she holds, created the moral framework that makes such recruitment possible. Reisman also endorses a book called "The Pink Swastika," which challenges the "myths" that gays were victimized in Nazi Germany. The Nazi Party and the Holocaust itself, she writes, were largely the creation of "the German homosexual movement." Thanks to Alfred Kinsey, she warns, the American homosexual movement is poised to repeat those crimes. "Idealistic 'gay youth' groups are being formed and staffed in classrooms nationwide by recruiters too similar to those who formed the original 'Hitler youth.' "

Reisman was not always a counterrevolutionary. Her parents were members of the American Communist Party, and she belonged to the Labor Youth League in Los Angeles in the nineteen-forties. But the sexual revolution caught her off guard, and she became concerned, first, about the spread of pornography. It was at an academic conference in Wales in the late nineteen-seventies that Reisman discovered Kinsey. She was lecturing on evidence of child pornography in *Playboy* cartoons, when, as she recalled it, a mysterious man approached her and said, "If you're really concerned about child sexual abuse you have to look at 'The Kinsey Reports.' I said, 'Why?' and he said, 'I worked with Kinsey and his aide Wardell Pomeroy. One is a pedophile and the other is homosexual.' I said, 'Which is which?' and he said, 'Read and discover,' and he walked away and changed my life."

Reisman won't say exactly whom she met with on Capitol Hill, but she was "very encouraged" by the response. She is hoping that someone will revive H.R. 2749, a bill introduced, at Reisman's urging, in 1995 to determine if "The Kinsey Reports" "are the result of any fraud or criminal wrongdoing." It has been languishing since its sponsor, Congressman Steve Stockman, of Texas, lost his bid for reëlection in 1996. "I certainly would like to see a congressional investigation. Let Congress establish the truth of this matter. Or let it go to a courtroom." She hopes that the film (along with two forthcoming television documentaries and a recent novel by T. C. Boyle) will foster a backlash, or at least persuade some of Kinsey's alleged eight hundred child victims to finally come forward. She envisions a class-action lawsuit modelled after the Big Tobacco trials. She said, "Suddenly, people ask, 'So much cost in celluloid, books, and press for some obscure sexual deviant in Indiana—who is profiting?' Follow the money."

Ultimately, Reisman and her colleagues hope to discredit not only Kinsey but the entire field of sexology which he created, and what she calls "the sex-industrial complex" that has grown out of it. "One doesn't measure American sexual habits," she said. "That's not a science."

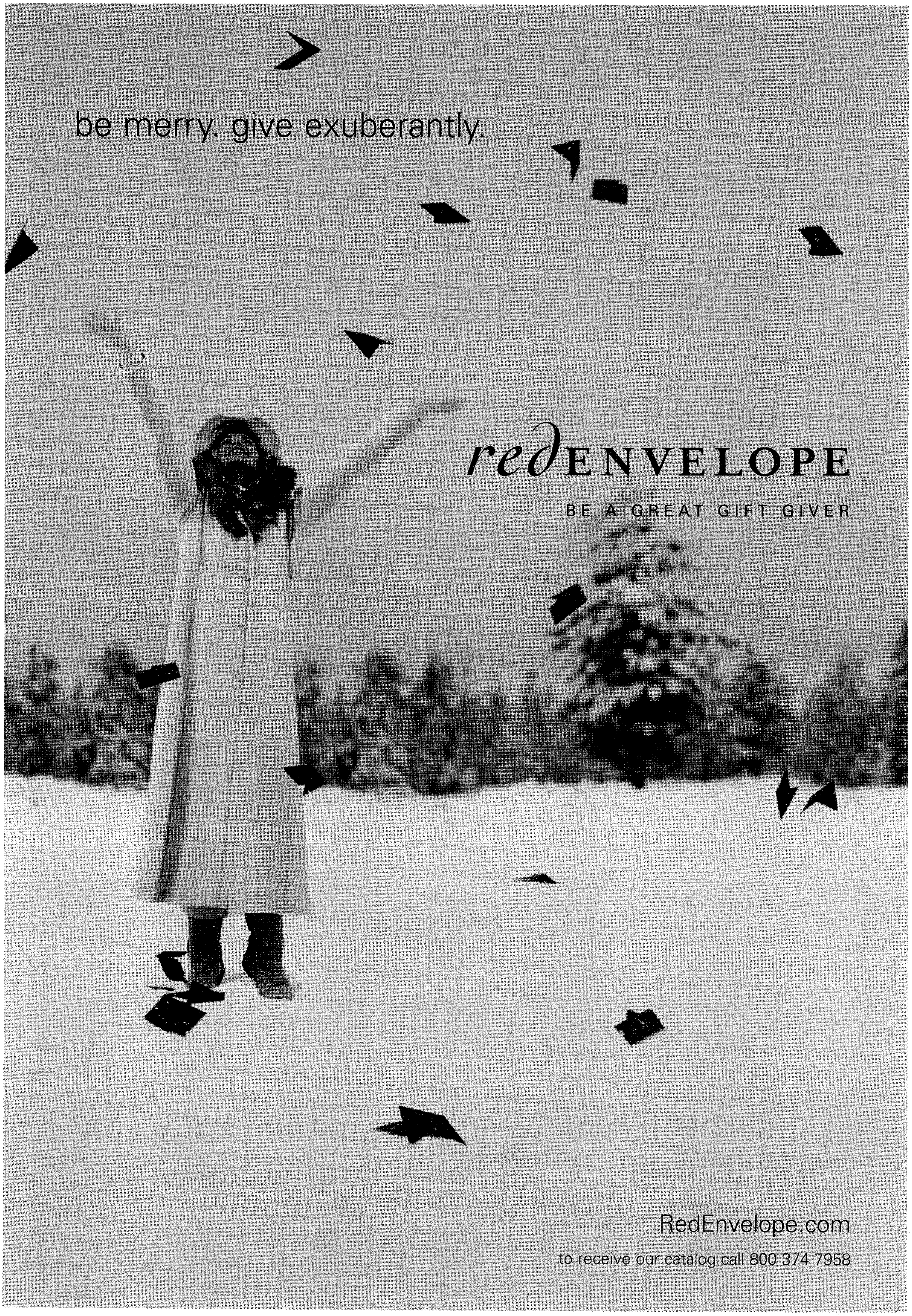
—*Daniel Radosh*

DEPT. OF DETERRENCE FOR THE BIRDS

For every pigeon-lover—Mike Tyson, Marlon Brando, the gentleman with the stale bread—there are a thousand citizens who can name the danger zones, those spots so populated with pigeons that human passage invites bombardment. In Jackson Heights, there's the corner of Seventy-third and Roosevelt, beneath the elevated No. 7 tracks. On the East Side: Eighty-sixth and Lex., southwest corner, and the Plaza's plaza—a fine mess to go along with the wafts of horse manure. Over on Broadway, these days, the threat level is highest at Seventy-third Street, on the mall. (Remember: Broadway, uptown, is a proper boulevard.) The park bench there, beneath a stark steel trellis, is perpetually empty owing to a stratum of guano.

The mall between Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Streets was supposed to be a model urban garden. Two years ago, the site was selected for a national design competition, run by the Broadway Mall Association. The winning plan, by a landscape-architecture student from Texas, called for vine-covered trellises at either end, and for an elegant arrangement of perennials in between, amid the London planes and hawthorns and oaks. It was chosen in part because, as the *Times* noted, it "stood a good chance of surviving in a tough environment." Twenty-five thousand dollars was spent on the initial planting—which was promptly ravaged, as the mall became a more pleasant place to scavenge and roost. Another attempt at planting, last spring, resulted in more devastation.

Enter the audio stratagem. Now, every seven or eight minutes, during the daylight hours, a loud and unfamiliar dose of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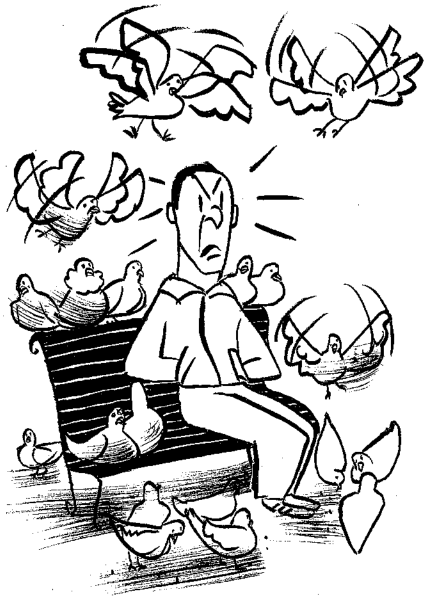
birdsong overwhelms the block for about forty seconds: wailing, whistling, screeching; one distinctly unpigeon-like call after the next, in rapid succession. Passersby stop and crane their necks. At lunchtime, early last week, an elderly woman crossed the street and set foot on the mall just as the chorus was beginning. She put her hand to her heart. "I only jaywalked, and all of a sudden they start screaming," she said, looking around in bewilderment. She fixed on the pigeons—nah, couldn't be—and then spotted the source: a small green device affixed to a traffic light, about twelve feet up. "Maybe that's supposed to scare away all the pigeons, instead of attracting them?" she said.



Correct. Parks Department officials, acting at the request of the mall association, installed the speaker two months ago, in an attempt to ward off the pigeons. They bought it from a company called Bird-X, and it is designed to project the sounds of various predators. It is the first and only such device in use in the city—an experiment. And perhaps it ought to remain that way.

Shortly after the elderly woman had departed, another woman, bundled up for a day outside, shuffled over, unzipped her jacket, and removed a plus-sized bag of Cheerios, which she then emptied, with a smile, on the patch of mostly bare ground behind the bench. Hundreds of pigeons descended, spilling over even into the path of northbound traffic. The woman began muttering in a foreign language and retreated to a bench across the street, in Verdi Square.

Paul Sweet, an ornithologist at the Museum of Natural History, showed up the next day, to help identify the birdcalls. He had a pair of binoculars, of course, and immediately spotted some other pigeon deterrents: porcupine spikes on the ledges of a bank across the street; a large plastic owl perched in one of the trees in the square. "That's useless," Sweet said. "I've seen pigeons perch on those owls' heads."

The birdsong began. "That first one sounded like a gull," he said. "Then a woodpecker." A pair of pigeons flew away: "Oh, there's a little movement." A few more birds arrived. A piece of shrapnel came in from above. The soundtrack changed once more. "That's a peregrine there," Sweet said.

The pigeons, meanwhile, still outnumbered the people on Broadway. "These tricks never work," Sweet said, walking back to the subway, and pointing out a starling and some house sparrows along the way. (The Cheerios lady was again sitting in the square, evidently as undeterred by the noise as the birds were.) "If you came here at night, there'd probably be even more of the pigeons, roosting. Probably thousands."

And mice. Later, at dusk, a man named Greg Pappas passed by the mall on his way home. He paused below the Bird-X speaker. "It's annoying, and it doesn't work," he said. "I live on the sixth floor over there, on Amsterdam, and I can hear that thing through my window all day."

He went on, "The problem is, there's this woman who comes here and feeds them, like, every day." He turned and faced the dirt behind the bench. "And, whatever the pigeons don't eat, the mice do. It's disgusting—look, there's hundreds of them."

—*Ben McGrath*

CLOSET-SPACE DEPT.
HOME ALONE

When Janine Reimen's daughter left for college, in the fall of 2002, Reimen was surprised to find that the filial departure did not bring grief to her and her husband, as she had anticipated; instead, it brought a measure of guilty exhilaration. "The moment she left, we were, like, this is great," Reimen said recently. But Reimen, who lives in Tribeca and is a social worker, suspected that other parents of recently departed children might need help adjusting to the novelty of solitude, and so this fall she started a support group for empty nesters. The group has been meeting on Tuesday evenings in a basement conference room at the Synagogue for the Arts, on White Street. There, amid shelves of prayer books and a little used ark, the mothers have been discussing the drama of the shifted child.

"My twenty-four-year-old son graduated from school three years ago, and this year he got a sublet in the same building that I live in," one mother explained during a recent meeting. "He's out of the house, but he didn't go too far. And already I feel the pangs of his going somewhere else." The fact that that somewhere else would be law school did not, she said, compensate for the impending loss.

A couple of the mothers were merely anticipating the unhappy day when their adult children would move on to adult lives. This was a move that, since the children already had full-service accommodations in an exclusive, expensive neighborhood, did not seem particularly imminent, crummy apartment shares in Astoria being for those unfortunate would-be New Yorkers whose parental nest is somewhere in the hinterlands, like Baltimore, or Darien. One mother said that her twenty-four-year-old son had settled in for the long haul. "By the time he is thirty, he wants to buy his own apartment in the Village," she said. "But his idea is that he will still have his clothes and everything at our house, and will come to us to do his laundry."

No one seemed to have greeted her child's departure as a welcome opportunity for renewed marital intimacy, extra storage space, or weekend trips to Paris. A mother of two, both away at college, said that the previous week's discussion had made her realize that she and her husband were already engaged in unconscious stratagems to lure their children home upon graduation. "We bought an apartment that is quite large in order to accommodate them," she said. "There are two floors and a separate

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entrance. It's so easy they are going to *have* to come home."

The mothers were mostly Tribeca pioneers in their late fifties and early sixties, who had deferred motherhood until the last possible moment. One unforeseen disadvantage of belonging to a countercultural generation set on rejecting societal institutions was making itself belatedly apparent. "I think this empty-nest thing is a new phenomenon," one weary-looking mother of two said. "I went to a Syrian wedding recently, and they all live just two blocks from each other." The other mothers nodded in sympathy and reminisced about the tightly knit, abandoned communities of their youth. There were, though, some irritations to the prolonging of domestic dependency. One mother described a breakthrough that she had achieved with her twenty-three-year-old daughter, a struggling actress who, in spite of moving in with her boyfriend, maintained her girlhood bedroom as a storage depot and had recently tried to expand her domain still further.

"She was trying to take over a closet in the hall, when she doesn't even really live there anymore," the mother said. "I was calm and firm." The closet discussion had led to a much larger conversation, during which the mother had divulged her feelings of loss. "I said to my daughter, if anything happened to me and I died, I wouldn't want you to feel guilty about pushing the envelope, like with the closet," she said. "If you feel guilty, I haven't been a good mother. She looked at me like, *huh*?" The mother raked her hand through wiry black hair, and sighed. "I wish I had made boundaries earlier on, so that now it wouldn't be such a problem," she said.

—*Rebecca Mead*

TOP THIS DEPT.
WHO'S COUNTING?

On the scale of public ignominy, the last person to squeeze into a crowded New York elevator rates somewhere between the guy who hits "reply all" to group e-mails and the one who blocks the box. So the other night, in the lobby of the Le Parker Meridien hotel, on Fifty-seventh Street, a latecomer who stepped out so that the doors could close was surprised to hear the other passengers beckoning her back. The elevator, it turned out, was full of world recordholders. They were heading to a gala that the Guinness Book of Records was throwing to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. "Let's see how many we can get in here!" a man with a cast on his right arm—Furthest Basketball Dunk from a Trampoline?—called out.

Once the passengers reached the forty-second floor (the building's highest, naturally), they were treated to a buffet dinner and a program that included videotaped salutations from Donald Trump and Regis Philbin and remarks by Stuart Claxton, Guinness's head adjudicator in North America. According to Claxton, all records, as long as they are verifiable, measurable, and breakable, are considered equally laudable (excepting such nonstarters as the dog with the fewest legs, the longest time staring at the sun, and an attempt, by a family in Hungary, to build the world's biggest wall of sausages). Claxton's speech was largely ignored. The recordholders were eager to get started meeting each other:

"Dan Netherland, two thousand and fifty pounds of concrete broken in 17.45 seconds."

"Arthur Blessitt. I've walked through three hundred and one nations, island groups, and territories."

"My name is Martin Strel, from Slovenia. You know where is Slovenia?"

It was possible, in the course of the evening, to decipher a pecking order, of sorts. For example, in ascending order of prestige: Most Bridal Bouquets Caught, Greatest Distance Moonwalked in One Hour, Most Golf Balls Stacked, Highest Shallow Dive, Most Sword Cuts Survived (this last one is in the process of being verified). At the top of the heap were Jackie Bibby, a Texan who can hold eight live rattlesnakes in his mouth for 12.5 seconds, and Ashrita Furman, of New York, who, with the most individual world records set (eighty-six), is something of a record breaker's record breaker.

Furman, a fifty-year-old travel agent and the manager of a health-food store, is renowned for, among eighty-three other things, balancing twenty-three milk crates on his chin for 11.23 seconds, somersaulting eight thousand three hundred and forty-one times in 10.5 hours over twelve miles, and scaling Mt. Fuji on a pogo stick. On the day of the gala, he had tried to set the record for Fastest 100m. While Seated on a Rubber Ball. "I'm very, very busy," he explained. "This is really just a fraction of what I do. I can hardly afford to be here. I'm leaving for China on Monday. I'm going on a spiritual retreat, but I'm hoping to break a few records while I'm there."

Furman played the paterfamilias graciously, signing other recordholders' Guinness books: "To a fellow impossibility challenger. Good luck! Ashrita"; "To Debbie—Reach for the Skies!" Furman said that he considered all record-setting endeavors equally worthwhile, because, "in some way, you're improving humanity," but he couldn't help making a distinction or two. "You know, the tallest guy, he didn't do anything to deserve it," he said. "It happens. And, you know, it's fascinating. But, for me, the discipline, the training, the challenge of it—that's what I'm after."

And so it was with a measure of deference that the bridal-bouquet catcher, Stephanie Monyak, whose métier requires little more than luck and a deep pool of single friends, approached Furman. "You've broken eighty records," Monyak said.

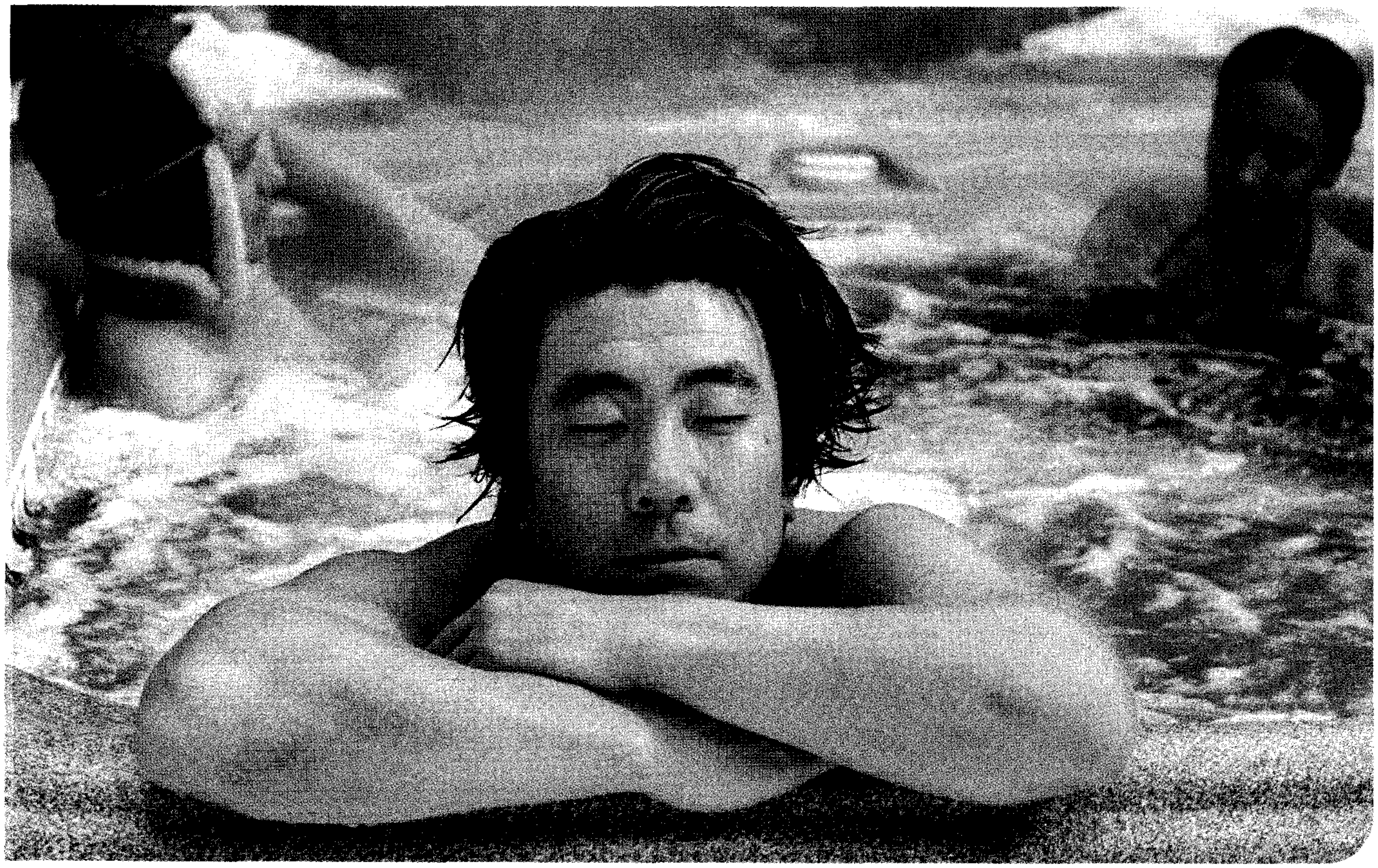
"Eighty-six, eighty-six," Furman said. "But who's counting?"

After Monyak had gone, Furman said, "Just being in this room, I'm beginning to get some ideas. Like, the moonwalking." He leaned in. "O.K., I hate to say it, but I don't think that guy is that good. If I was gonna do it, I'd get to be really good. I mean, it's a mile and a matter of technique."

One by one, the honorees were summoned to the front of the ballroom to receive certificates and medals: the Long Distance Grape Catcher, the Fastest Talker. Then the m.c. announced that there would be a final award, for lifetime achievement. He called out the name Ashrita Furman, and the crowd turned to see Furman bounding across the ballroom on a pair of springy stilts—the tallest man in the world.

—*Lauren Collins*

Isn't it strange that your dry cleaning got you to a place where you don't even have to wear pants?



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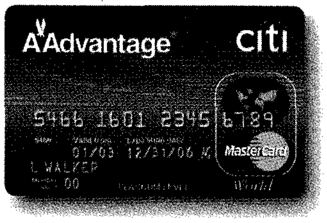

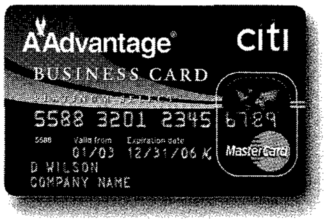

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POSTCARD FROM STANFORD

PERMANENT FATAL ERRORS

Did the voters send a message?

BY LOUIS MENAND

"You can't imagine how much time it takes to lie on the floor in a fetal position," Mark Mellman explained to a gathering of political scientists and polling experts at Stanford a week after the Presidential election. Mellman is the C.E.O. of the Mellman Group and, until his services were rendered unnecessary by events, was the lead pollster for the Kerry campaign. He is a friendly and outspoken man, with the look of dishevelment that is associated with brainy enthusiasm, and it was entertaining to imagine him curled in a ball somewhere after November 2nd, trying to forget about a very bad night for John Kerry and for the art of polling.

MORALITY
IMMORALITY

The "values voters" myth let Democrats turn a defeat into a learning experience.

BARRY BLITT

One of the Bush campaign's leading pollsters was at the conference, too—Jan Van Lohuizen, the president of a group called Voter Consumer Research. Van Lohuizen is a figure of more businesslike mien, a man whose reaction to disappointment would not, one feels, include lying on the floor. He and Mellman had been on the radio together at 7 P.M. the night of the election, a time when there was every indication, from the exit polls, that the Presidency was going to change hands. At Stanford, Mellman admitted to "the cardinal sin," as he put it, "of gloating, and gloating early and inappropriately," on the air, and he apologized to Van Lohuizen. Van Lohuizen was gracious, in the spirit not so much of a good winner as of a professional who has been there, too, and who fully expects to be there again one day. The pollsters are like the pundits and the press: they are the survivors. Politicians come and go, but there is always another campaign.

"How did people decide for whom to vote?" was the question that the Stanford postmortem was organized to answer. There were, by November 9th, plenty of answers out there already, of course. Everybody had an opinion. You can't not have an opinion, and that's the problem. A consensus that George Bush won because voters cared about *x* easily turns into a consensus that voters were "sending a message" about *x*, and this determines the story line of the next four years. Ultimately, it can determine the three paragraphs on the election of 2004 in every American-history textbook of the future. But picking out the *x*, if there is an *x*, from the dozens of available reasons that Bush won and Kerry lost is a delicate piece of statistical calculation. This is why polling is an art.

Why did you order the cheeseburger? "Because I always order the cheeseburger" is an acceptable answer. "Because I felt like a change" is also acceptable. But those (or their electoral equivalents) are generally not considered good answers to the question "Why did you vote for John Kerry?" Most people feel that a civically responsible answer must name an issue. So they say something like "Because I am very concerned about the rising cost of health care." In fact, though, millions of people vote the way they do on the theory of "I always order the cheeseburger." This is not because of ignorance or indifference; on the contrary, many people who follow politics closely are partisans who choose the Republican or the Democrat no matter what. They have already picked the party, and they let the party pick the candidate. It's a reasonable and respectable labor-saving device.

And, in some elections, "I felt like a change" is the only reason many people have for voting against an incumbent. "Leadership, for a change" was a slogan that Bill Clinton campaigned on against George Bush in 1992. It worked, because Bush's approval rating went as low as thirty-three per cent—about the same as Jimmy Carter's in 1980, when Carter lost to Ronald Reagan. The

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younger Bush's approval rating was fifty per cent, which is low for an incumbent seeking reëlection. But he was less vulnerable to a need-for-change strategy because this year, as Mellman explained at the Stanford conference, voters reported that they wanted stability. Kerry therefore tried to work "change" into his message without using the actual word—for example, he called for a "new direction." Evidently, the voters were not fooled.

The potential story line that floated fastest to the surface after the election was that voters were sending a message about moral values. This is a little strange, because the "moral values" peg is entirely an artifact of the very exit polling that led Mellman to his brief and illusory moment of Election Night triumph. Those polls, as everyone knows, were a fiasco. Exit polls conducted by the National Election Pool (a consortium created by the networks, CNN, and the Associated Press to replace the service that was responsible for the disastrous miscalls of the *last* Presidential election) and the Los Angeles *Times*, along with election predictions by Zogby International, showed Kerry pulling away. CNN, on its Web site on Election Day, posted exit polls that, according to Steven Freeman, at the University of Pennsylvania, had Kerry winning Ohio by 4.2 percentage points (he lost by 2.5 points), Pennsylvania by 8.7 percentage points (he won by 2.2), and Minnesota by 9 points (he won by 3.5). At 5:30 P.M. on Election Day, Zogby's Web site had Kerry with a projected total of three hundred and eleven electoral votes, a blowout. (Kerry ended up with two hundred and fifty-two electoral votes to Bush's two hundred and eighty-six.) At 8 P.M., journalists were looking at national exit polls showing Kerry winning the popular vote by three points. And even after the polls had closed in Virginia the networks designated the race there too close to call, based on the exit data. Bush won Virginia by nine points.

Traditionally, polls that ask people whom they just voted for have been regarded as about as sound as polls can get—which is why their failure this time gave so much anguish to Kerry supporters. People don't forget, in the few minutes after leaving the booth,

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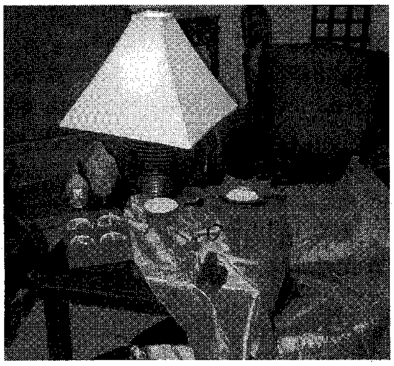

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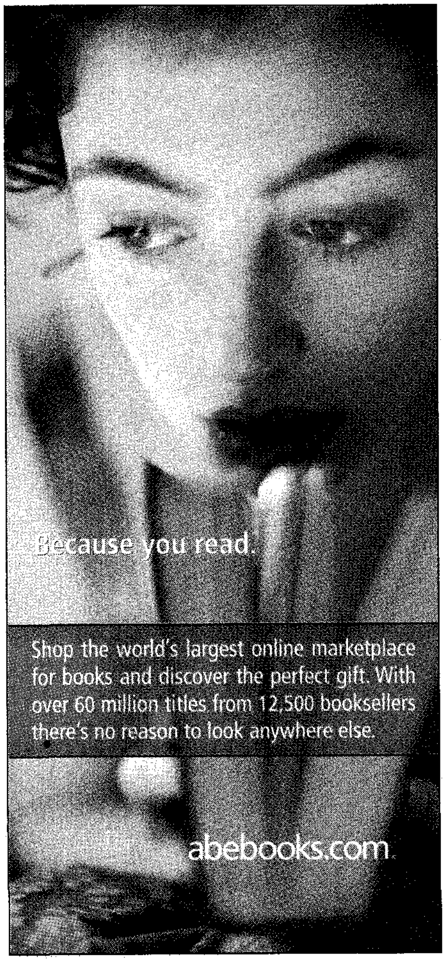
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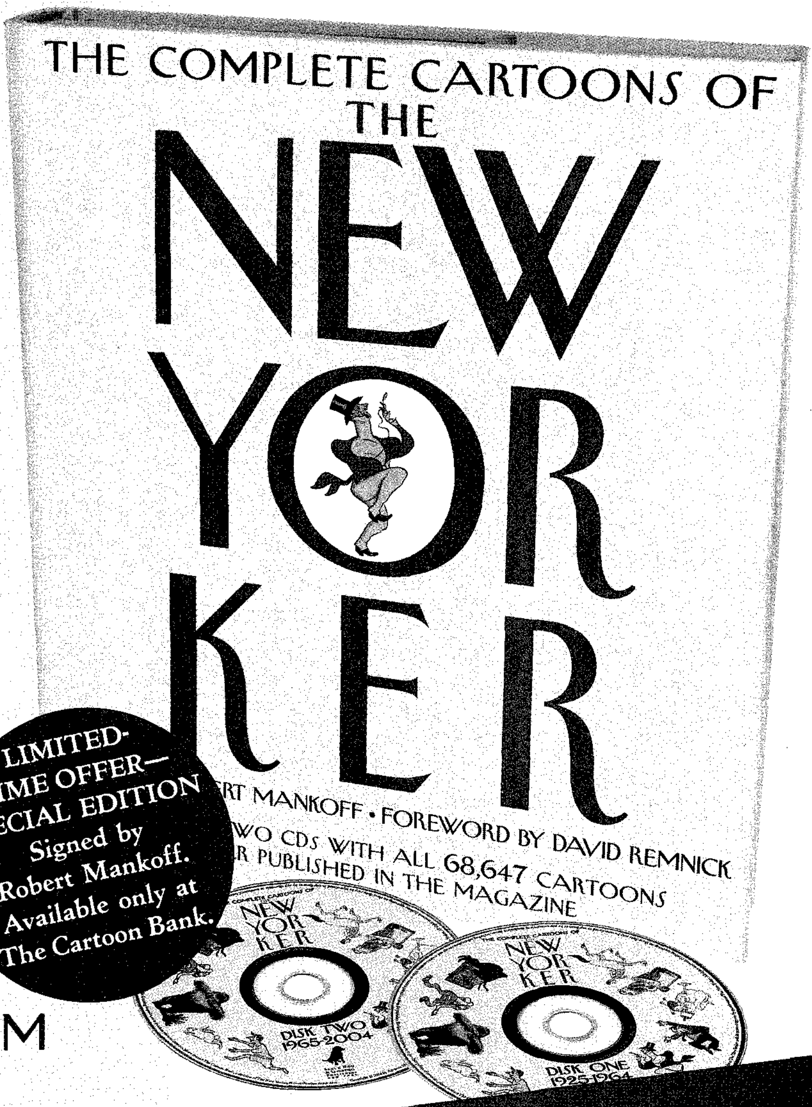
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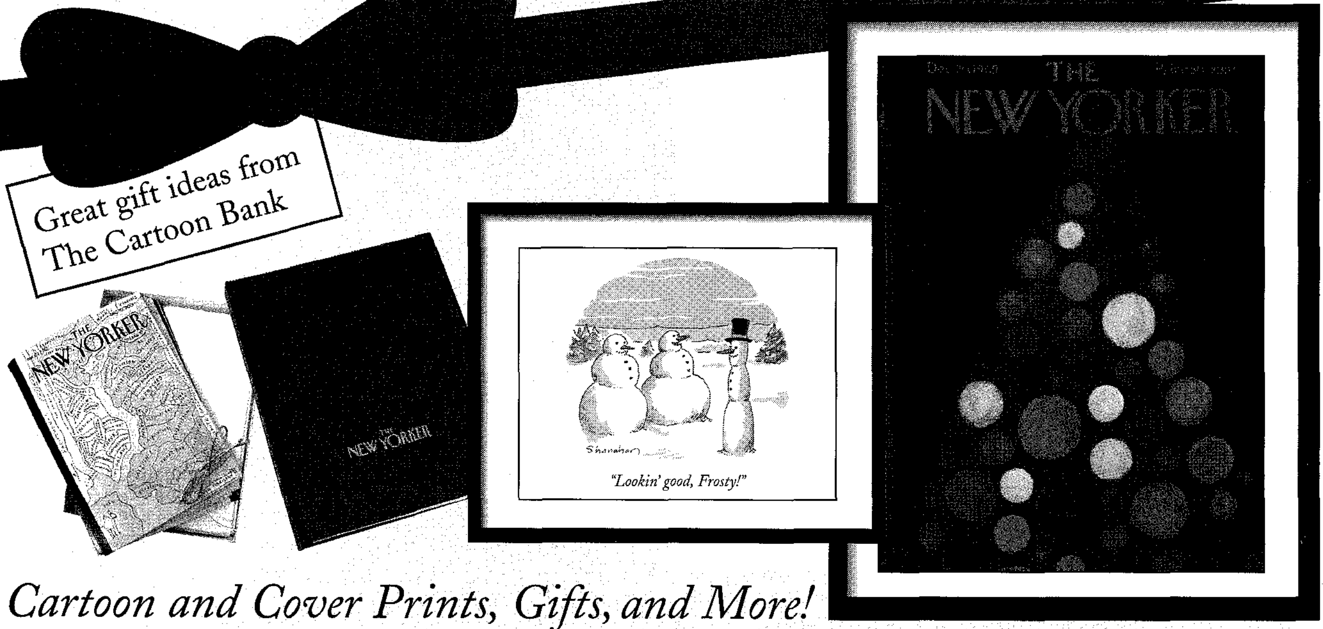
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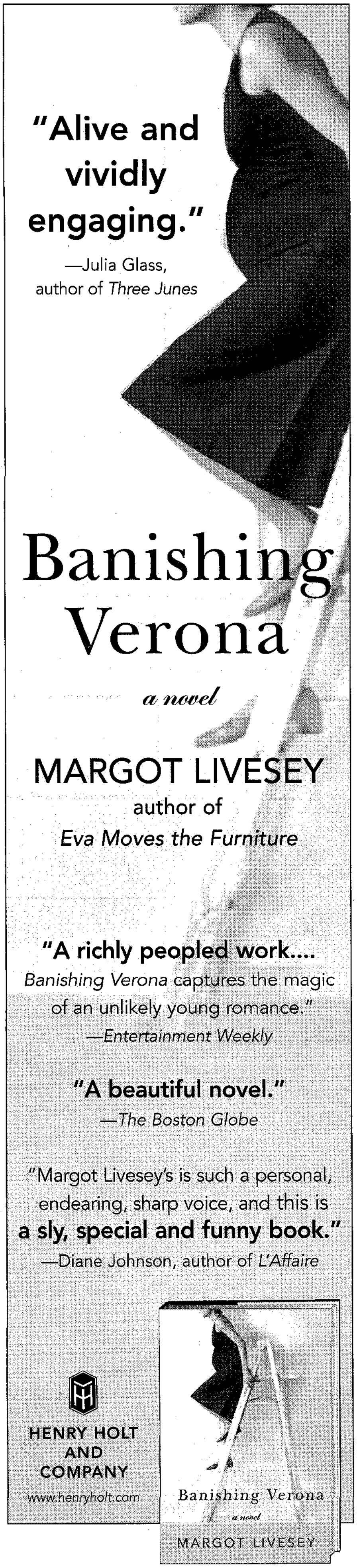

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AFTER MIDNIGHT

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nor is it the dancing god,
hovering over the alpine waters of Sils Maria,
pointing beyond himself as he leaps,
filling speech balloons like Superman.
It's just the two of us, paired,
when, around midnight,
war threatens yet again,
after the late news
led by the kitchen radio:
in an old-fashioned foxtrot
we draw together
all that's about to pull us apart.

Just a few measures, love,
before you see to it—
as you always do around this time—
that we get our pills:
single ones and numbered.

—*Günter Grass*

(Translated, from the German, by Charles Simic.)

whom they chose; they have little reason to lie; and their answers aren't affected by the I-was-at-Woodstock syndrome, which leads more people to claim, after they know the outcome, that they voted for the winner than actually did. But polls that ask people *why* they voted for a particular candidate have usually been regarded with a heavy drip of saline solution—not because people do not tell the truth but because they often don't know the truth. If a poll has trouble naming the winner within the margin of error, how reliable are its answers to the question why people voted the way they did?

The National Election Pool questionnaire asked people leaving the polls to pick "the ONE issue that mattered most in deciding how you voted for president." These were the reported results:

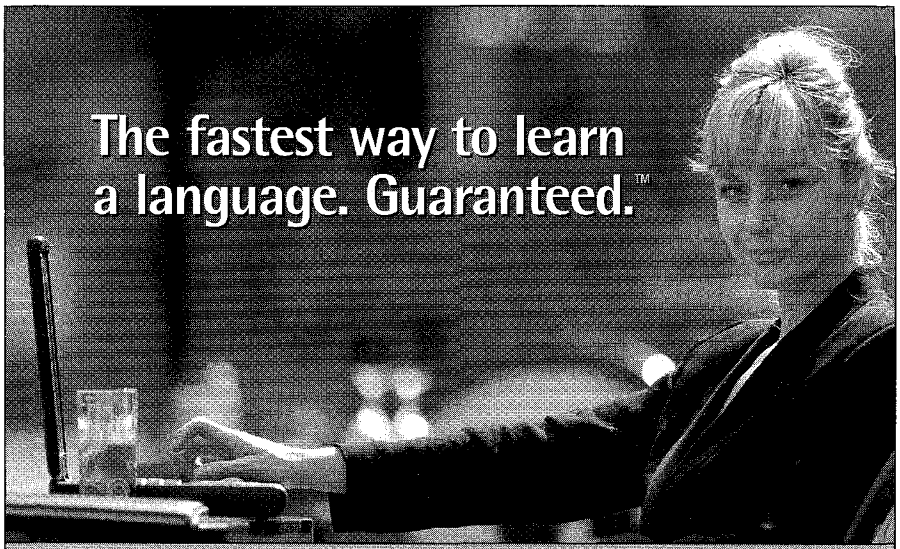
Education	4%
Taxes	5%
Health care	8%
Iraq	15%
Terrorism	19%
Economy/jobs	20%
Moral values	22%

Eighty per cent of the respondents who picked "moral values" as the issue that was most important to them voted for Bush, but even the Bush pollster dismissed the significance of the poll. The "moral values" number, Van Lohuizen said at Stanford, is "entirely determined by what else is on the list." Voters weren't asked to name an issue that mattered to them; they were asked, in what is known in polling as a "closed-ended question," to pick one answer out of seven. "And, if you look at the list, there are a lot more places for a Kerry voter to park himself than for a Bush voter to park himself," Van Lohuizen said. "That's point No. 1. Point No. 2: if you give people a list of seven and you ask them what's their top concern and the highest number is twenty-two, that means there is no consensus. It means that there was no one issue that drove the election."

The belief that the issue of "moral values" was somehow decisive is tied to the belief that a greater proportion of voters this year were highly religious. This, too, is a belief unsupported by the data. "As a conservative, you love to see the liberal media twinge and say, 'Oh, my God, it's these moral values,' " Van Lohuizen said. "It was an important factor, but I have seen no data that it was more important in '04 than it was in 2000 or '96. I've seen no data that, in the composition of the electorate, the religious voter was more heavily represented." More churchgoers turned out to vote in 2004 than in 2000, but only because more people turned out to vote.

According to a report on Beliefnet, a religious Web site, by Steven Waldman, the editor of the site, and John Green, a political scientist at the University of Akron, forty-three per cent of Ohio voters in 2000 attended church once a week or more often. In 2004, the figure was forty per cent. In Florida in 2000, forty-one per cent of voters were regular churchgoers, but only thirty-five per cent were this year. Bush even seems to have won a greater percentage of voters who never attend church than he did in 2000. "Moral values" has been tracked as an issue in Presidential elections at least since 1992. Many voters care about moral values, but there is no reason to conclude that more voters care about them now than ever. At Stanford, Kathleen Frankovic, the director of surveys for CBS News, pointed out that in the Los Angeles *Times* exit poll voters were asked to identify, from a closed list, the issues that were most important to them. In 1996, the year Clinton was reëlected, forty per cent chose "moral/ethical values"; in 2000, thirty-five per cent chose it. In 2004, it was back to forty per cent. And a recent report from the Pew Research Center shows that on open-ended surveys, which allow respondents to name any issue that matters to them, items associated with moral values finish behind the economy and the war in Iraq.

The phrase "moral values" is open to interpretative license. Peace and social justice are moral values; they just happen not to be values associated with the Bush Administration. Most commentators assume that voters understood the phrase as code for two issues: gay marriage and abortion. So-called "marriage initiatives," designed to prevent same-sex marriages, were on the ballot in eleven states and carried easily in all of them, even Oregon, where fifty-two per cent of the voters voted for Kerry and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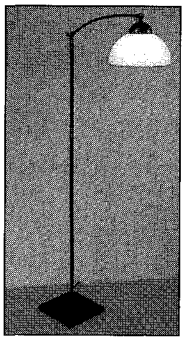

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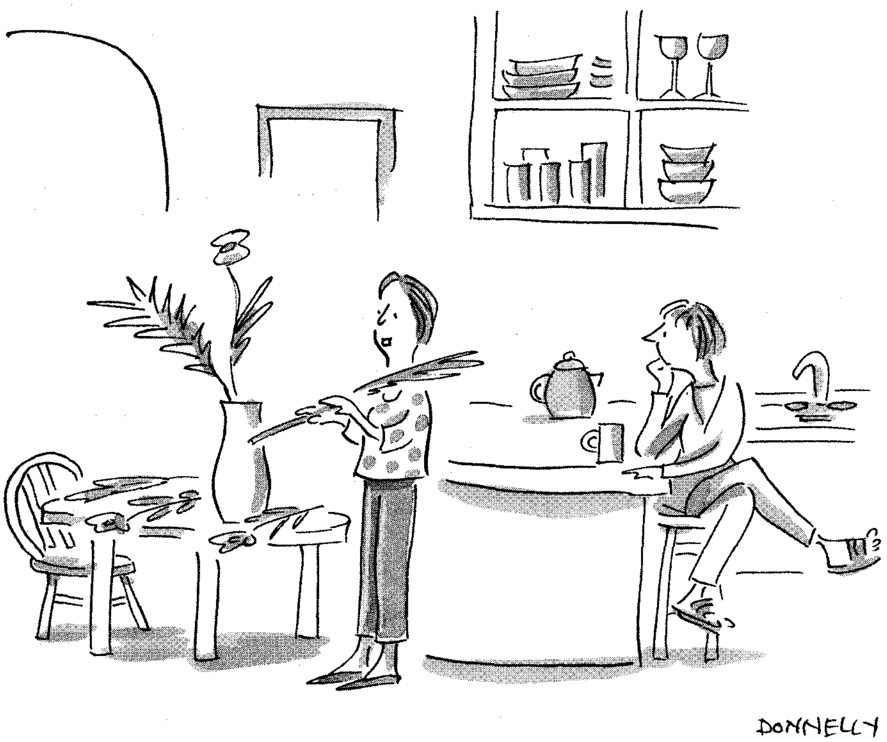

"It's not a possibility now, but when the kids are grown Sam and I figure we'll have time for a divorce."

fifty-seven per cent voted against gay marriage. (Kerry, after all, is not a supporter of gay marriage.) Still, there was agreement among the experts at Stanford that the presence of a marriage initiative on the ballot did not measurably increase turnout for Bush, and did not help him win states that he otherwise would have lost. If the National Election Pool's list had offered "gay marriage" instead of "moral values," it is hard to imagine that twenty-two per cent of the respondents would have pointed to it—an assumption that seems to be confirmed by the Los Angeles *Times* exit poll, where voters were asked specifically about gay marriage and abortion. A smaller proportion of voters picked those as important issues than picked "moral values" on the National Election Pool questionnaire, and they split almost evenly between Bush and Kerry.

"Why did President Bush win this election?" Gary Langer, the director of polling at ABC News, said at the Stanford conference. "I would suggest that the answer can be expressed in a single phrase: 9/11." No one there disagreed. "Fifty-four per cent of voters on Election Day said that the country was safer now than it was before September 11, 2001," Langer pointed out. "And perhaps, I would suggest, more important, forty-nine per cent of voters said they trusted only President Bush to handle terrorism, eighteen points more than said they trusted only John Kerry." He went on, "Among those who trust only Bush to handle terrorism, ninety-seven per cent, quite logically, voted for him. Now, right there, if forty-nine per cent of Americans trust only Bush to handle terrorism and ninety-seven per cent of them voted for him, those are forty-eight of his total fifty-one percentage points in this election. Throw in a few more votes on ancillary issues and that's all she wrote." Langer thinks that a key statistic is the change in the votes of married women. Gore won the women's vote by eleven per cent; Kerry won by only three per cent, and he lost most of those votes among married women. Bush got forty-nine per cent of the votes of married women in 2000; he got fifty-five per cent this year. And when you ask married women whom they trust to keep the country safe from terrorists fifty-three per cent say "only Bush." (The really salient demographic statistic from the election is one that most Democrats probably don't even want to think about: If white men could not vote, Kerry would have defeated Bush by seven million votes.)

Assuming that the election did come down to a referendum on terrorism, there was very little that a Democrat could have done to win it. Kerry could not change the subject; war and terrorism were in the news every day. According to Mellman, polls showed that although only thirty-three per cent of voters thought that the invasion of Iraq was worth it, fifty-two per cent thought that it was the right thing to do. Those are tough numbers from which to devise a campaign strategy. They are the numbers behind Kerry's notorious trouble in parsing the matter of his own position on the invasion—his attempt to criticize the outcome but not the decision. It's getting hard to remember now, when Iraq has become a violent and ungovernable mess, but the invasion of Iraq had overwhelming public approval, and people don't like to admit that they were wrong. Neither does the President. It's one of the attributes that voters seem to identify with.

Of course, it doesn't matter what the science of public opinion concludes. It only matters what the politicians conclude. If Democrats believe that the lesson of the election is that the Party needs to move to the right, then, if it moves, that will be the lesson. It might be wiser for the Democrats to chalk Bush's reëlection up to 9/11 and stick to their positions. The Democratic candidate did not lose votes in 2004: Kerry got five million more votes than Al Gore got in 2000, when Gore won a plurality. Unfortunately for the Democrats, Bush got nine million more votes than he did four years ago. But it wasn't because the country moved to the right. The issue that seems to have permitted an incumbent with an unimpressive approval rating to survive reëlection was not an ideological one. The country did not change radically in the past four years. Circumstances did. ♦

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In an article about the adverse health effects of certain kinds of clothing, pages 8 and 9, G2, August 5, we omitted a decimal point when quoting a doctor on the optimum temperature of testicles. They should be 2.2 degrees Celsius below core body temperature, not 22 degrees lower.

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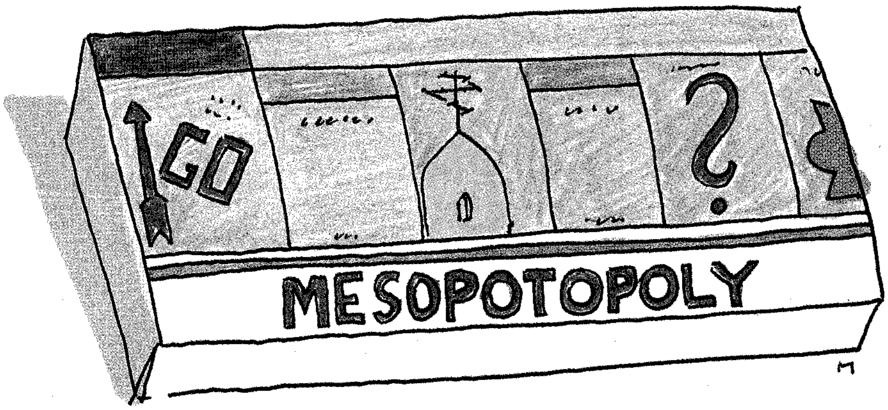
FLOODING THE ZONE

BY GEORGE SAUNDERS

I’ve completed the math.

There are approximately twenty-five million Iraqis in Iraq. There are approximately three hundred million Americans in America. This means that there are approximately twelve Americans for every Iraqi. This means that, if we all go, each American will be responsible for one-twelfth of an Iraqi. An Iraqi family of five will thus be attended by sixty Americans. We will come, this second wave of three hundred million of us, unarmed. We will bring nothing but ourselves. We will simply show up, saying, “What would you like for dinner?” While we cook, our Iraqis can just relax. God knows they have had a terrible couple of years. We will encourage them to sit on their couches, if they still have couches, while we clean up after dinner. We will bring them coffee, tea, dessert, whatever they like. All these months, we have winced from over here, imagining their pain. Once we are there, we will do what we can to say, “We like you, and want the best for you. We’re sorry. This was not what we intended. No matter what it might have looked like to you, we have always wished you well.”



MICHAEL CRAWFORD

After dinner, our Iraqis will smile, whispering among themselves. “Not so bad, these unarmed ones,” they will say. “That coffee was super.”

Some of you might be wondering: What about the insurgents?

Well, even the most energetic insurgent will have a hard time getting much done, saddled, as he will be, with his twelve designated Americans. Imagine how hard it will be to sneak off with your insurgent friends, much less deploy a roadside bomb, when, every time you move, your twelve Americans leap up and ask if there’s anything you need. Say you are going out to assault a convoy. Good luck! You skulk into the night, and suddenly the three Fitzsimmonses and the four Jacksons and the five elderly Peterkin brothers are walking along with you, asking where you’re headed, wondering if that distinctive style of Iraqi hut has a particular name, asking if there’s anywhere to get a decent cup of decaf, telling an endless story about how hard it was to get a decent cup of decaf in Paris, for God’s sake.

Some might ask: What about provisions? Simple. Each American will bring a thirty-day supply of food from his or her local market. Hams, turkeys, huge roasts of beef, wheels of brie, large jars of Greek olives, bottles of champagne. We will also bring our TVs and our microwaves and our refrigerators, along with generators. We will sit around with our host families, eating ourselves into a pleasant stupor, watching TV, playing board games (we will also bring board games). If anybody gets sick, we will locate a good American doctor in one of the nearby host homes and lavish the sick Iraqi with the finest in American care.

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Will it be crowded? It will. A ten-person Iraqi home will overflow with a hundred and twenty Americans. Will it be hot? Iraq is a desert country, and our new homes will, yes, be quite hot and crowded. Plus, as the Iraqis eat our food and watch our TVs they will no doubt become fatter, thus making their homes even more crowded.

But the over-all result will be: No more violence. Nobody killing anybody. We may get cranky, we may get a little bored, an Iraqi may now and then accuse an American of cheating at Risk, but nobody will die. Everyone will be eating and watching TV and struggling to move around and waiting in line for the bathroom, and in this atmosphere all killing will stop.

And once the killing stops we can all begin to discuss democracy.

What is democracy? Is it right for you people? If not, what would you prefer? Is there anything we can do to help? Is there anything we can build, fix, expand? If not, O.K. If so, let us at it. There is no charge—our government is paying. Those suckers have no idea where the money is going, so let's sock it to them; I don't care a bit, as long as you get what you need.

Now, a reasonable question is, what will be happening in the completely deserted United States of America at this point?

This is where Phase II of my plan begins.

Once the U.S. has been vacated, the Palestinians will be moved into the Western U.S. and the Israelis will be moved into the Eastern U.S. Between them will roll the mighty Mississippi. Even if they wanted to get to each other and do some killing, sorry, no. Armed U.N. guards will be posted at every bridge.

Besides, the Palestinians will be enjoying San Francisco and Los Angeles and the Grand Canyon, and the Israelis will be having wonderful weekends in Boston and Chicago, seeing Bar Harbor, tooling around Manhattan, whatever they like.

Meanwhile, the Canadians will move into Palestine and Israel, and do a National Makeover. All existing houses will be razed and replaced with beautiful mansions. The mansions will alternate: Jew, Palestinian, Jew, Palestinian. Every house will have a pool and a grill and a sauna, and a new flag hanging in front of it, the flag of a new nation, Plisraelistine.

Phase III involves shipping everyone in Kosovo to Canada while the Canadians are getting Plisraelistine ready. Since there are only around two million Kosovars, it is expected that any remaining tensions will dissipate as the two million Kosovars wander through this vast new land, rarely ever seeing one another, being frightened into a peaceful humility by the occasional wolf or bear.

Meanwhile, back in Iraq, we will be saying our goodbyes.

The country, sated and plump, gone soft after months of leisure, will finally be at peace. They will be so glad to be getting rid of us. Suddenly, their houses will feel sprawling and roomy. Suddenly, their country will seem like their country again.

From there, it's fairly simple. The Plisraelistinians fly home to their beautiful new country. They are so amazed at their excellent houses that all thoughts of fighting disappear. The Canadians return home just as the Kosovars, refreshed from their stay in Canada, inspired by the boundless wheatlands and staggeringly beautiful mountain vistas, relieved at the relative absence of wolves and bears, return home, resolved anew to give peace a chance.

I think it could work. It is only a matter of will, of giving up certain comforts (our homes, any concept of privacy, our jobs, our businesses, etc.). The hardship is great, but so will be the reward: an Iraq where nobody is killing or dying, an Iraq caught up in an ecstasy of normalcy, boredom even—people bickering, committing adultery, gossiping, sleeping in the middle of the day, mouths hanging open, flies flying in.

And then we can all get to work on the Sudan. ♦

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DOMESTIC LIFE

WHAT TEACHERS WANT

The hazardous ritual of classroom gift-giving.

BY CAITLIN FLANAGAN

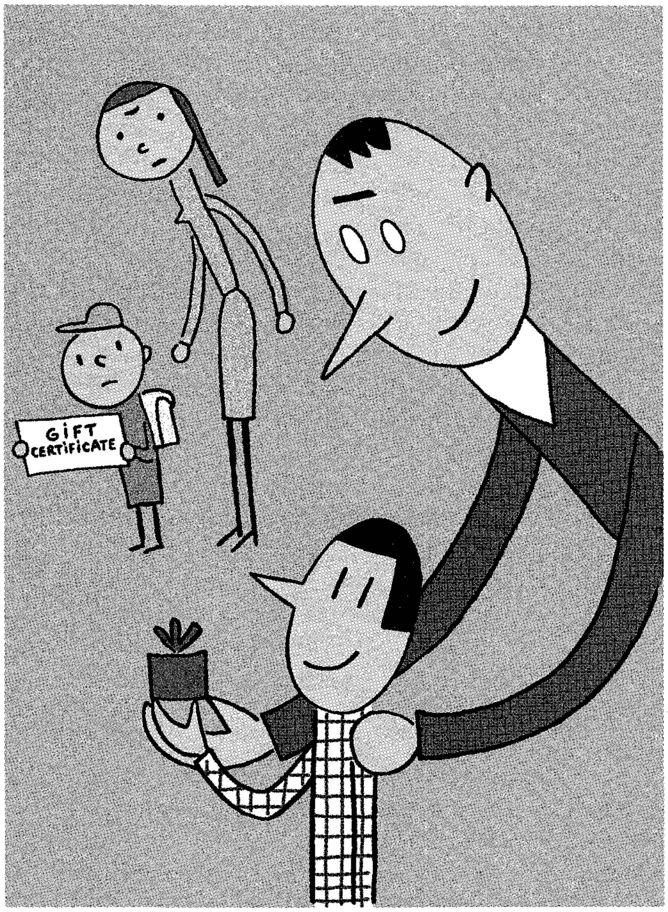
If you had a box filled with fourteen lime-green plastic shrimp forks and then you lost one, there are several things you could do. You could invite twelve people to dinner and serve shrimp. You could put the forks in a drawer and hope that the lost one eventually turned up. Or you could tape the box closed, wrap it in holiday paper, and give it to your child's history teacher for Christmas.

Tim Newhart, who is a teacher at Harvard-Westlake Middle School, in Bel Air, California, where I used to teach in the Upper School, was the recipient of the forks. "I held on to them for a while, out of shock," he says. "And also to remind myself how bizarre this job is."

In ten years at the school—which has a campus that looks a little like Celesteville, with crenellated towers and rose gardens laid out on one of the most valuable plots of land in the world—he has learned that, during the holiday season, "you get both incredibly thoughtful and incredibly thoughtless gifts." Also some valuable ones: a bottle of Veuve Clicquot, for example, and large gift certificates to Borders and Barnes & Noble. One of Newhart's colleagues, Alan Buster, observes that the Christmas gifts he has received from students over the years confirm a truth that he had previously encountered only in literature: "The well-to-do can be both very, very generous and oddly chintzy."

The gift-giving mores in Los Angeles private schools tend to shock out-of-towners. Rachel Davis, who is thirty-three, and who comes from a family of teachers, began her career at the Chapin School, in New York, where elaborate teacher gifts were frowned upon. One year, however, the class parents chipped in on a tote bag, inside of which Davis was stunned to find two hundred dollars. She was thrilled with the gift, but the other teachers at the school considered it tacky and told her so. Then she moved to California.

She took a job at the Curtis School, high above the city on Mulholland Drive. "Curtis is a much more money-centered school," she says matter-of-factly. "Money, money, money."



In private moments, teachers confess to being swayed by presents.

PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

In her first year, she was presented with a gift of eight hundred dollars from the entire class. She gave two hundred to her assistant teacher and happily kept the rest. In addition to the money, parents gave her other costly gifts: a cashmere Juicy Couture sweatshirt, a watch, a Gucci cosmetic bag. Her colleagues who had called the cash-filled tote bag tacky started thinking about moving to L.A. Some of the gifts showed a kindness that Rachel remembers to this day: when her son, Tot, was born, a pediatrician parent made sure that she never needed to buy a single can of formula; the same woman gave her a Miniman coat for the baby. Like many teachers, Davis considers the most insulting gifts to be things that the parents wouldn't want themselves: a candle, a mug, or the universally loathed Cross pen, which is regarded in much the same way that a Victorian servant regarded the Christmas gift of a new uniform. Another despised present is the gift-with-purchase sack of sample cosmetics from a department store. "You don't get the main gift," one teacher remarked bitterly. "You get what came with the gift."

Teachers are often assumed to be suffering a kind of genteel poverty in which even a free mini-lipstick constitutes a boon. John Wellington, a former college counsellor at Harvard-Westlake and now the dean of students at Riverdale, in New York, recalled a particularly baffling present: a hundred-dollar gift certificate to Ralphs supermarket. "What am I supposed to do with this?" he asked a colleague, giving every indication that he'd never been to a Ralphs, or possibly even to a supermarket. "Buy a big ham?"

"Give it to your housekeeper," his friend said—a sensible suggestion, but surely not what the giver had in mind.

In East Coast cities, long-established private schools have educated the same families through successive generations, passing along norms and proprieties—for example, the understanding that a plate of gingerbread cookies would make a fitting gift for a favorite teacher, while a certificate for a facial at Elizabeth Arden would be vulgarity itself. In Los Angeles, the independent-school scene is relatively new. Only forty years ago, California's public-school system

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"Is the asparagus farm-raised or wild-caught?"

• •

was excellent. Now—thanks to a 1977 law that equalized spending across the state; Proposition 13, which cut property-tax revenues in half; and an influx of immigrants that has increased student enrollment to the point of collapsing the system altogether—it is one of the worst in the nation.

The public schools in L.A. have been hit especially hard by these forces, and consequently a large number of parents who might never have considered private school have decided to send their children to one if they can possibly afford it. (Of the two million school-age children in Los Angeles County, some two hundred and twenty-five thousand attend private or parochial schools.) Parents often arrive on opening day with a variety of emotions familiar to anyone who heard, for example, Bill and Hillary Clinton explain their choice not to send their daughter to public school in Washington, D.C.: they believe in public school in the abstract, but, when it comes to their own children, ideals can easily be sacrificed to perceptions of safety, enrichment, and academic excellence.

Among the first generation of parents at a cadre of élite schools—where the tuition is often higher than fourteen thousand dollars a year—there are those who are forging customs of their own. It should come as no surprise that the venerable tradition of giving a gift to the teacher has evolved from its simple roots, when nothing more was required than an apple harvest fine enough to yield a good specimen and a friendly child—or a terrible little fawner—to bestow it. As one former teacher at an L.A. private school says of the munificent parents he has encountered, "If they like you, they give you expensive gifts—that's how they show affection." But there is sometimes a less admirable calculus at work. Once parents see what their children get in exchange for private-school tuition fees (a gorgeous campus, small classes, extracurriculars) the obvious question is, How much else can a little extra money buy?

Oakwood Elementary School is situated on a soulless and much trafficked street in the San Fernando Valley, near the 101 and 134 freeways. The classrooms, which have something of the quonset hut about them, are pressed together on a small tract of land; a nearby park serves as the playing field. In the perverse way of such things, it is one of the most expensive schools in town, and admission is as rare and significant as an eclipse. Oakwood appeals to Hollywood types in that it combines a hippie ethos with exclusivity; the headmaster gives a speech to prospective parents about "the moral imagination of children," which is the kind of vague but inspirational phrase that has been known to reduce supplicants—worried that their lefty politics will be compromised by private school—to tears.

Kristine Belson, a movie producer with shiny brown hair, the slim figure of a girl athlete, and two small children, fell in love with the place during a tour. By the grace of God, and perhaps with the intercession of several other notables, Belson's older child, Kate, was granted a spot. As with most mothers, Belson's love for her child tends to spill over onto those who nurture and care for the child; in this light, almost no gift would have been too generous for the woman who had made the little girl feel so welcome and well looked after at her new school. And yet Belson does not deceive herself about her motives in giving a good gift. "At schools, they're always talking about 'special families,' " she told me. "You want to be one of those families." As for the present itself—Kate's teacher got a gift certificate to Lady Foot Locker—she said, "If you can afford it, why not give a useful present?"

A more pointed question might be, Who wants the handmade treasures that some mothers prompt kids to give? A casual survey of teachers reveals: just about no one—although perhaps there are exceptions. Jill Bauman is a passionate and vocal advocate of her children's private school, Turning Point, which is housed in an impressive steel-and-glass building on a somewhat gritty corner in Culver City. The Baumans have a tradition of making hot-fudge sauce, which the children, seven-year-old Isabelle and five-year-old James, deliver to their teachers, an approach that is in line, Bauman says, with the Turning Point spirit: "It's just not a Prada kind of place." Those too busy to make a gift are welcome to contribute to a fund used to buy the teachers gift certificates, each of which can easily reach three hundred dollars.

"Which gift do you think teachers prefer?" I asked Bauman on the telephone, thereby initiating the first silence of our conversation. "I don't know," she said at last, sounding a little troubled. "But we always get fabulous thank-you notes for our fudge."

Julia Johnson, who lives in an old Los Angeles neighborhood called Hancock Park, sends her children to the Third Street School. "I think people who send their kids to private schools are idiots," she told me. "Are they paying to buy their kids brains?" She and the other parents at the school have settled on a modest gift-giving protocol. "We collect five or ten dollars from people, and then we buy a gift certificate for the teacher," she said.

Because the gift-giving system is largely unregulated, it ends up being an expression of the parents' value system; what gifts they give and how much they spend reveal their sense of the school pecking order. Parents who work in the entertainment industry come from a culture in which gift-giving, particularly at holiday time, is thoroughly identified with doing business. What could be more natural than trying to secure access and teacher accountability with a little something from Nordstrom's? (Within the industry, a typical mid-range gift has been the spa gift certificate or the cashmere blanket, but "this is going to be the year of the iPod," says one television producer who was planning on giving—and expecting to receive—several this year.) Hollywood parents also understand that a headmaster is a bit like a studio chief in his power to make things run smoothly. A sizable donation to the annual fund can keep you from having to toady up to the little people at all.

Many private-school students in Los Angeles are first-generation Asian-American, and a substantial number of

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Specific rules for Sleigh Full of Cashmere Giveaway. A. **Entry.** The Sweepstakes will begin at 12:01 a.m. (C.S.T.) on October 28, 2004 and all entries must be received by 11:59 p.m. (C.S.T.) on December 16, 2004, (the "Sweepstakes Period"). **Automatically Entered:** All recipients who are subscribed to receive the Lands' End E-Newsletter as of October 28, 2004 by 11:59p.m. (C.S.T.) are automatically entered into the Sleigh Full of Cashmere Giveaway. **Internet Entry:** Enter by visiting the Sleigh Full of Cashmere Giveaway official registration page on the Lands' End Website at www.landsend.com/sleigh and completing all of the required information and following all instructions to register for receipt of the weekly Lands' End E-Newsletter. One entry per e-mail address. **Mail Entry:** You may also enter during the Sweepstakes Period by legibly handwriting your name, age at the time of entry, complete address, return zip code, and daytime telephone number on a "3 X 5" card or piece of paper, and mailing or delivering it to Holiday Giveaway, 2 Lands' End Lane, Dodgeville, WI 53595. If we receive your entry before 11:59p.m. (C.S.T.) on December 16, 2004, you will be eligible to win. Only (1) one entry per envelope. Only (1) one entry per person. Lands' End, Inc. ("Sponsor") will not be responsible for incomplete, lost, late, postage-due, misdirected or illegible entries or for failure to receive entries due to transmission failures or technical failures of any kind, including, without limitation, malfunctioning of any network, hardware or software, whether originating with sender or Sponsor. In the event of a dispute, all online entries will be deemed to have been submitted by the owner of the e-mail account from which they were sent. For these purposes, an e-mail account holder shall mean the natural person assigned to such e-mail account by the Internet access provider, online service provider or other organization responsible for assigning e-mail addresses for the domain associated with such e-mail account. Any questions regarding the number of entries submitted or the owner of an e-mail account shall be determined by Sponsor in its sole discretion, and Sponsor reserves the right to disqualify any entries by persons determined to be tampering with or abusing any aspect of the Sweepstakes. B. **Prizes and Odds.** One (1) Grand Prize Winner will be selected in a random drawing from among all eligible entries to be held on or about December 21, 2004. Grand Prize Winner shall receive a cash award of Four Thousand Two Hundred Dollars ($4,200) which Winner may use to pay taxes and may also choose one of the following Grand Prize options: Option One: One full-size antique sleigh (approximate retail value $8,000) and a collection of Lands' End cashmere product or an assortment of other Lands' End merchandise to be chosen by winner (approximate retail value $6,000); Option Two: One full-size antique sleigh (approximate retail value $8,000) and Six Thousand Dollars ($6,000) worth of Lands' End Gift Cards, redeemable for merchandise only; Option Three: Eight Thousand Dollars ($8,000) worth of Lands' End Gift Cards, redeemable for merchandise only and Six Thousand Dollars ($6,000) of assorted cashmere and/or other Lands' End product to be chosen by the winner; Option Four: Fourteen Thousand Dollars ($14,000) worth of Lands' End Gift Cards, redeemable for merchandise only; or Option Five: Any portion of the total Grand Prize valued at Fourteen Thousand Dollars ($14,000) in Lands' End product to be chosen by Winner and any remaining balance in Lands' End Gift Cards, redeemable for merchandise only. Odds of winning depend on the number of eligible entries received. Sweepstakes may be presented in multiple presentations and in other media, and the odds of winning may depend on the number of eligible participants who enter the Sweepstakes through such multiple presentations. C. **Winner Notification and Acceptance.** Winners will be notified by telephone, e-mail and/or U.S. Mail on or about December 21, 2004. Winner has ten (10) business days to respond and claim prize in accordance with these rules or an alternate winner may be selected. Return of prize notification as undeliverable may result in disqualification and an alternate winner may be selected. Winners may waive their right to receive prizes. Prizes are nonassignable and nontransferable. No substitutions allowed, except that prizes and individual components of prize packages are subject to availability and Sponsor reserves the right to substitute prizes of equal or greater value. Winners are solely responsible for reporting and payment of any taxes on prizes. Winners may be required to complete an affidavit of eligibility, and a liability and publicity release (except where prohibited by law) which must be returned within ten (10) days of date of postmark. Failure to sign and return the affidavit or release within ten (10) days, or to comply with any term or condition of these Official Rules, may result in a winner's disqualification, the forfeiture of his or her interest in the prize, and the award of the prize to an alternate winner. Except where prohibited, participation in the Sweepstakes constitutes entrant's consent to the publication of his or her name, biographical information and likeness in any media for any commercial or promotional purpose, without limitation or further compensation. For prize winners list (available after January 10, 2005), send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Lands' End, Inc., 5A Lands' End Lane, Dodgeville, Wisconsin 53595, Attn: Public Relations. D. **Participation.** By participating, entrants agree to be bound by these Official Rules and the decisions of the judges. Sponsor reserves the right to disqualify persons found tampering (including the use of scripts or other electronic means to submit multiple entries automatically) with or otherwise abusing any aspect of this Sweepstakes as solely determined by Sponsor. In the event the Sweepstakes is compromised by a virus, nonauthorized human intervention, tampering or other causes beyond the reasonable control of Sponsor which corrupts or impairs the administration, security, fairness or proper operation of the Sweepstakes, Sponsor reserves the right in its sole discretion to suspend, modify or terminate the Sweepstakes. Should the Sweepstakes be terminated prior to the stated expiration date, Sponsor reserves the right to award prizes based on the entries received before the termination date. **Specific rules for 50-day Giveaway, $1,000 Gift Card and $1,000 Charity Donation.** A. **Entry. Two Ways to Participate:** The Sweepstakes Period begins at 12:01 a.m. (C.S.T.) on October 28, 2004 and ends at 11:59 p.m. (C.S.T.) on December 16, 2004 (the "Sweepstakes Period"). **Entry by Purchase:** You will be automatically entered in the Sweepstakes when you complete an original (i.e., not return or exchange) order by telephone, online, via facsimile or by mail (including credit approval) for merchandise from Lands' End during the Sweepstakes Period, Lands' End Business Outfitters not included. If your qualifying purchase is completed before 11:59 p.m. (C.S.T.) each day within the Sweepstakes Period, you will be eligible to win one of fifty (50) daily Prizes. **Enter Without Completing a Purchase:** You may also enter during the Sweepstakes Period by legibly handwriting your name, age at time of entry, complete address, return zip code, and daytime telephone number on a 3"x5" card or piece of paper, and mailing or delivering it to Holiday Giveaway, 2 Lands' End Lane, Dodgeville, WI 53595. Limit one entry per envelope. If we receive your entry before 11:59 p.m. (C.S.T.) on any day within the Sweepstakes Period, you will be eligible to win the daily Prize for the date in which your post card is received. Lands' End, Inc. will not be responsible for incomplete, lost, late, postage-due, stolen, misdirected or illegible entries. Any questions regarding the number of entries submitted, and the date on which they were submitted shall be determined by Sponsor in its sole discretion, and Sponsor reserves the right to disqualify any entries by persons determined to be tampering with or abusing any aspect of the Sweepstakes. You may enter the Sweepstakes as often as you like but only one (1) prize per person. B. **Prizes and Odds.** One (1) Winner will be selected each day in a random drawing from among all eligible entries received on that day for each day during the Sweepstakes Period. Each daily Winner will receive (a) One Thousand Dollar ($1,000) Lands' End Gift Card redeemable for merchandise only; and (b) the ability to designate a Charitable Organization to receive a One Thousand Dollar ($1,000) charitable contribution from Lands' End (approximate retail value of each daily prize is $2,000). 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Return of prize notification as undeliverable may result in disqualification and an alternate winner may be selected. Winners may waive their right to receive prizes. Prizes are nonassignable and nontransferable. No substitutions allowed, except that prizes and individual components of prize packages are subject to availability and Sponsor reserves the right to substitute prizes of equal or greater value. Winners are solely responsible for reporting and payment of any taxes on prizes. Winners may be required to complete an affidavit of eligibility, and a liability and publicity release (except where prohibited by law) which must be returned within ten (10) days of date of postmark. Failure to sign and return the affidavit or release within ten (10) days, or to comply with any term or condition of these Official Rules, may result in a winner's disqualification, the forfeiture of his or her interest in the prize, and the award of the prize to an alternate winner. Except where prohibited, participation in the Sweepstakes constitutes entrant's consent to the publication of his or her name, biographical information and likeness in any media for any commercial or promotional purpose, without limitation or further compensation. For prize winners list (available after January 15, 2005), send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Sponsor at 2 Lands' End Lane, Dodgeville, Wisconsin 53595, Attn: 50 Day Giveaway. D. **Participation.** By participating, entrants agree to be bound by these Official Rules and the decisions of the judges. Sponsor reserves the right to disqualify persons found tampering with or otherwise abusing any aspect *of this Sweepstakes as solely determined by Sponsor. In the event the Sweepstakes is compromised by a virus, non-authorized human intervention, tampering* or other causes beyond the reasonable control of Sponsor which corrupts or impairs the administration, security, fairness or proper operation of the Sweepstakes, Sponsor reserves the right in its sole discretion to suspend, modify or terminate the sweepstakes. Should the Sweepstakes be terminated prior to the stated expiration date, Sponsor reserves the right to award prizes based on the entries received before the termination date.

these are Korean-American. In Asian cultures, teachers are deeply respected members of society for whom a perfectly chosen and conspicuously expensive gift is not a harried mother's afterthought but her central holiday preoccupation. Danny Seo, whose parents were born and raised in Korea, and who graduated from St. Matthew's School in Pacific Palisades, says, "In Korea, education is absolutely everything. The respect that teachers have there you can't parallel to anything here." When he was in kindergarten and misbehaved at home, his mother would threaten to call his teacher. "It's ingrained in you that your teacher is the most important person in your life," Seo says. He remembers going to school each Christmas with an enormous shopping bag filled with gifts. "There was one for the crossing guard, the bus driver—everyone. And they weren't cheap. They were Chanel perfume, things like that." These gifts expressed genuine gratitude, but he thinks they also expressed something else: "the competitiveness of women in general, and of Korean mothers in particular."

Giving becomes considerably more intense at certain key points of a child's school career. The fifth- and sixth-grade teachers who write middle-school recommendations, for example, have probably never seen a rewrap. At the apex of the system are the college counsellors, whose hands are on the machinery of the most crucial aspect of a student's life, and who are, moreover, sending out transcripts and recommendations during the two weeks before Christmas break.

The standard college-counsellor gift is a seventy-five- or hundred-dollar gift certificate, and the average counsellor at a top school in L.A. takes home roughly two thousand dollars. The extraordinary gift, however, is hardly unheard of. Vincent Garcia is the director of college counselling at Campbell Hall, a kindergarten-through-twelfth-grade school in the San Fernando Valley, which enjoyed a spasm of national attention last June when Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen graduated from it. He has received any number of wonderful gifts, the two best involving the Staples Center: courtside seats for the Lakers and second-row seats for a Prince concert. These were gifts that kept on giving, because a number of other Campbell Hall parents saw him on the Jumbotron, put two and two together, and realized that they needed to up the ante when their time came.

There is always the possibility of hurt feelings and mixed messages—one school administrator received a weighted vase from the gift shop at Forest Lawn cemetery; a female teacher was given six pairs of panty hose in a shade called "nude." Worse, the system encourages rivalry among a group of parents who probably need no encouragement, and introduces the spectre of influence peddling to the classroom. As one father, a former attorney, says, a bit dramatically, "It compromises the fiduciary nature of the teacher-student relationship." Nevertheless, his wife spends about five hundred dollars a year on teacher gifts.

One woman who taught at a private high school for eight years and is now retired says that she was troubled by "the big money gift, or the elaborate gift from a struggling student"—something that happened often and was not always easy to interpret. "We were kept from having too much one on one with the parents, thank God, so you never got to know if it was their personality to be generous or if it was just step No. 43 in their plan to get the kid into Yale," she says. Sometimes when she was filling in the grade sheets the gifts came uncomfortably to mind. Another teacher confesses that a good gift will get a kid the "courtesy upgrade," the modest nudge upward that can be the result of classroom participation, being a good egg, or otherwise unrewarded effort. Still, the retired teacher says, "we worked really hard, so an appropriately lavish thing is wonderful, lovely. We're giddy to get it."

Clearly, the thing to do is to institute a policy prohibiting such gifts, but few school heads are eager to make that move. What could be more politically disastrous? (Gray Davis, the former governor of California, had a strict "no gifts" policy, which Arnold Schwarzenegger has guiltlessly repealed, to the delight of the state's civil servants.)

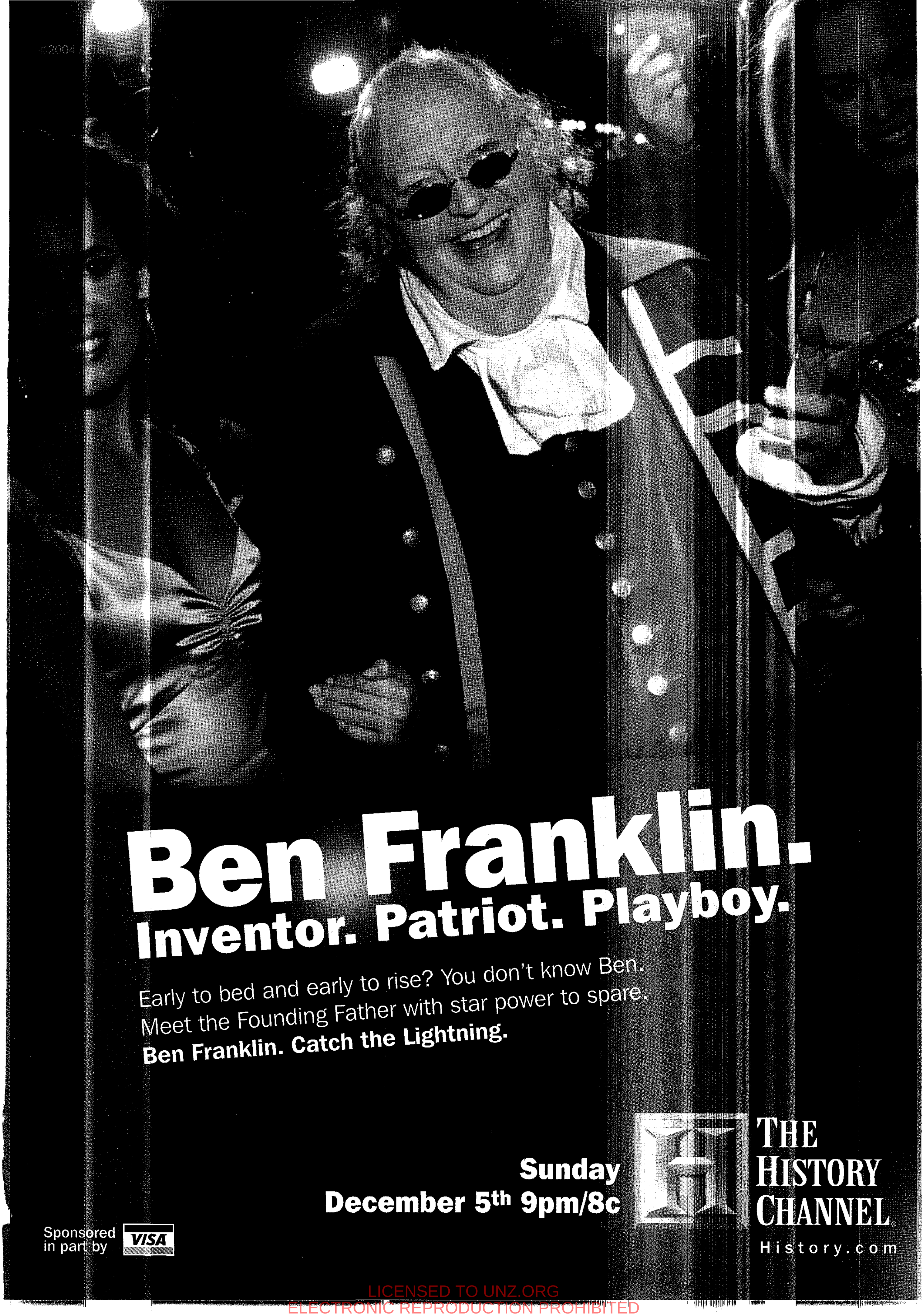
There have been pioneers, however. Twelve years ago, John Wellington, the former college counsellor at Harvard-Westlake, gathered his advisees before the holidays and told them that if they were moved to bring him anything besides a plate of cookies or a card they were allowed one option: a donation to a college fund he had recently established for a needy teen-ager. ("I don't need an Hermès wallet, and if I did I'd buy one myself," he said.) He taped a manila envelope to his office door, and it was soon stuffed with checks. Perhaps the impetus for the students' charity was tied up in their own college aspirations, but nevertheless their donations helped send the recipient to Wesleyan.

At the Center for Early Education (which my children attend), Reveta Bowers, the school head, is "on a tear about gifts." As we sat in her commodious and well-appointed office, she told me that for the past five years she has sent parents a letter asking them not to give gifts to school administrators, and this year she is thinking of asking her teachers to consider a similar policy. "Ours is a profession that is under siege all the time," she said. "When we allow ourselves to be tipped—brought to the level of service workers—we invite people to view us as less than professional."

She gestured to her credenza, where there was a beautifully wrapped present. "That's going back," she said. "I don't accept anything."

The Brentwood School requires teachers to report to the business office gifts worth more than two hundred and fifty dollars, which is apparently the threshold of what Michael Pratt, the head, calls "conflict of interest." Last year, Pratt took a bolder step: he published a letter in the parents' newsletter asking parents to contribute to the Brentwood Fund, if they were so inspired, in lieu of giving to individual teachers. "It helps the school and the teachers to do good work," he told me. "The old system was inherently divisive." How has his edict gone over with the faculty? "Well, this may be a case where the head is the last to know," he says. "But I haven't heard a single complaint."

"Some people thought it was pretty lousy," one Brentwood teacher says, although she admits that it's something of a moot point: she has seen no diminishment in either the number or the type of gifts. She says, "The parents ignore absolutely everything you tell them." ♦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GOD DOESN'T NEED OLE ANTHONY

Televangelists have called him a cultist, a fraud, and the Antichrist. He says he's just doing what Jesus would want.

BY BURKHARD BILGER

Ole Anthony is tall and gaunt, with a shock of white hair and searing blue eyes. He has a high, bony forehead and the pale, scraggy features of his Norwegian ancestors (his first name is pronounced "Oh-lee"). His many enemies, most of them televangelists, sometimes call him Ole Antichrist, and it's true that he has a certain familiarity with apocalypse. When he was an intelligence operative with the Air Force, he witnessed a nuclear blast at close range. A few years later, he was accidentally electrocuted. Evangelists often claim that they've been "slain in the spirit"—possessed so completely by the love of Jesus that they've died to themselves—but Anthony, who is sixty-six, really looks as if he'd just stepped off a gurney. He looks the way Moses might have looked had he been born in Minnesota.

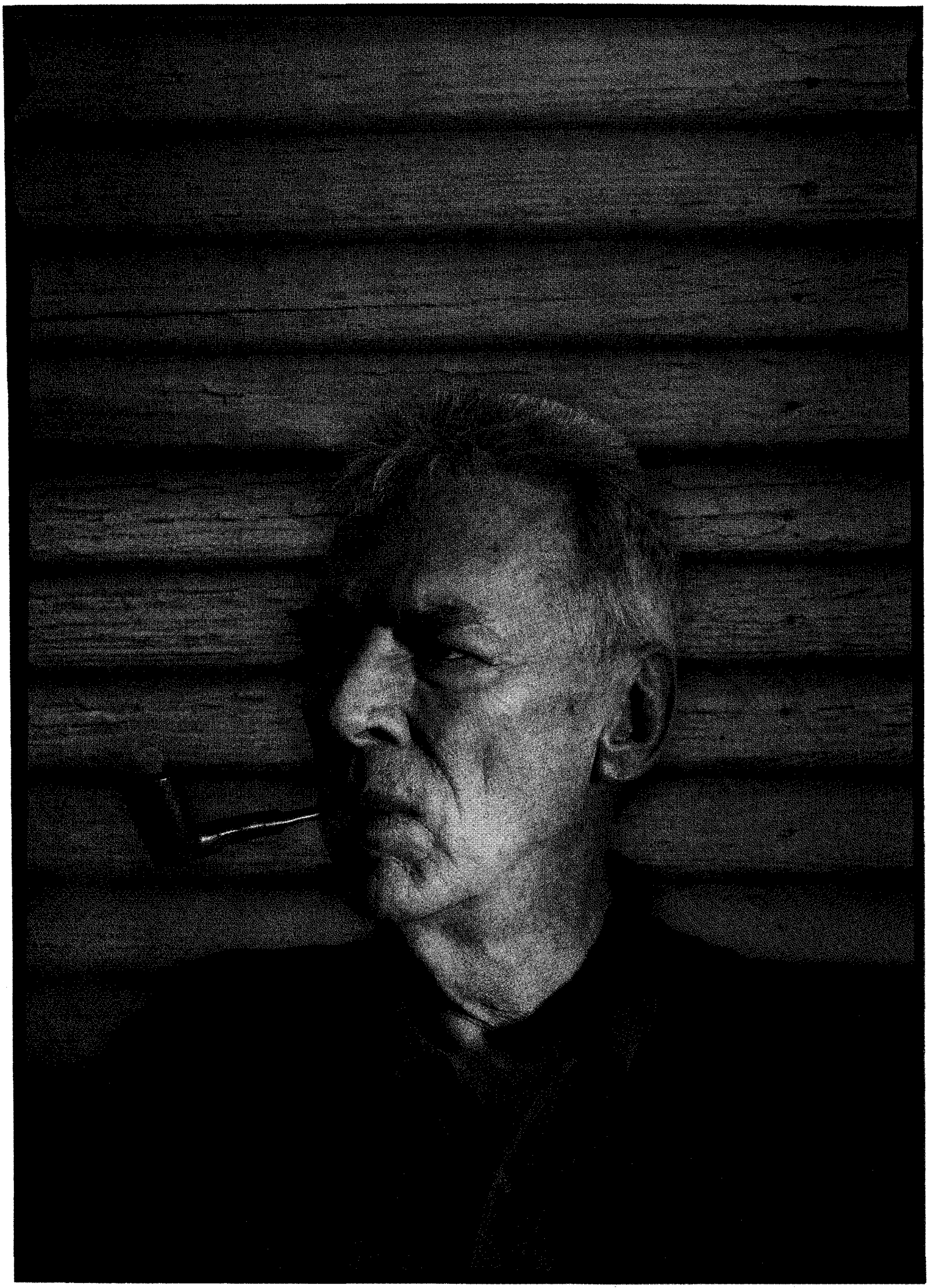
Anthony is the founder and president of the Trinity Foundation, a religious community in East Dallas that functions variously as a soup kitchen, a rehab center, a Christian publishing house, and a private detective firm. Trinity's fifty or so active members (supported by some four hundred other donors) live in a row of creaky two-story bungalows with deep, shaded porches, along a dead-end street in a neighborhood known as Little Mexico. They take most of their meals in a communal dining hall and meet three times a week for Bible studies that have been closer in spirit, at times, to barroom brawls. The problem with the modern church, Anthony believes, is the church itself. So he has patterned Trinity on the underground Christian communities of the first century, before denominations or cathedrals or the strict separation of Christian and Jew: a church before churches existed.

The first time I visited, I asked Anthony what drew him to the area. He looked at me as if I had lost my mind. "Nothing," he rasped. In the late nineteen-seventies, when Trinity's first members arrived, there was a flophouse across the street and the neighborhood was ruled by two of the most dangerous gangs in Dallas—the East Side Locos and the A.V. Boys (A.V. stood for "Always Violent"). The place has improved only a little since then. During the day, old women wrapped in shawls sell hot tortillas on the corner, and a man with sunburned skin sits by the highway overpass holding a sign: "Visions of a Cheeseburger." In the evenings, the local toughs drink too much tequila or rum and like to fire their handguns into the air. "They're just fun bullets," one Trinity member told me. "The police don't even bother to investigate anymore." Most members have taken in homeless people for months or even years at a time, and new probationers and petty criminals arrive every week, seeking shelter or performing community service. "You don't come here because you choose to," Anthony said. "You come here because you're desperate."

Yet East Dallas does offer Trinity one distinct advantage: proximity to its targets. Over the past fifteen years, Anthony has waged a guerrilla war against televangelism—"a multibillion-dollar industry," as he describes it, "untaxed and unregulated, that preys on the elderly and the desperate." The United States has an estimated eighty million evangelical Christians, and about twenty-five hundred ministries that broadcast to them over radio and television. Dallas, the buckle of the Bible Belt, is one of their unofficial headquarters. Fifteen miles from Trinity's ramshackle homes, its opposite number, the Trinity Broadcasting Network, owns a gleaming office building that resembles the White House. Since 1973, TBN has created a twenty-four-hour lineup of religious shows that now go out over forty-six satellites to nearly seven thousand television stations worldwide. A few of its most popular ministers, among them local figures such as Benny Hinn and Kenneth Copeland, tend to preach what's known as the "Prosperity Gospel," which promises health and wealth to all true believers and generous donors. Twice a year, TBN hosts "Praise-a-thons," which raise an average of ninety million dollars each.

Anthony calls this the "Gospel of Greed" and has made it his mission to expose its excesses. Six Trinity members are licensed private investigators, and they have a network of informants and undercover agents in ministries across the country. Their most damning discoveries have led to prosecutions for fraud and to exposés on "PrimeTime Live," on "Dateline NBC," in the Los Angeles *Times*, and elsewhere. Trinity's admirers like to think of the foundation as the conscience of evangelical Christianity. Its targets prefer to call it a godless, penniless, and deeply annoying cult. "The televangelist I worked for not only feared Ole—he wanted to do him physical harm," one of Anthony's informants told me. "These guys think he's Satan incarnate."

The opinion is not a new one. When Anthony was six years old, the family's Lutheran minister, in St. Peter, Minnesota, asked his mother not to bring him to catechism class anymore. "He told her I was an evil child," Anthony says. "I was disruptive and asked too many questions." After his family moved to Wickenburg, Arizona, Ole pulled himself together for a while. He earned straight A's in school and a citizenship award from the local veterans' association. But at the age of sixteen the Devil reclaimed him—"Or maybe it was just hormonal," he says. He grew his hair down his back and shot Mexican heroin with his girlfriend. He went on joyrides in stolen cars. The spree culminated in the high desert on an Easter morning in 1955, at a chapel in a natural amphitheatre that had a forty-foot cross. Anthony took a can of gasoline and doused the cross, then lit a



"Nobody is trying to sell God here," Anthony says of his religious community, in East Dallas. Photograph by Dan Winters.

match and threw it on—just in time for the sunrise service. "The cross was treated with creosote, and it burned forever," he says.

The police gave him the usual ultimatum for small-town delinquents: he could go to prison or enlist in the military. He ended up at Parks Air Force Base, near San Francisco, where he scored so well on a battery of tests that he was transferred to Denver for intensive training in geophysics, atmospheric science, and electronics. "We heard every kind of rumor," he says. "We were going to be super-spies. We were going to blow up Russia." In fact, the Air Force was training him to detect nuclear tests in countries suspected of developing the bomb. For the next twelve years—from 1956 to 1968—Anthony skulked behind the Iron and Bamboo Curtains, installing arrays of seismic, atmospheric, and oceanographic sensors. When a nuclear blast occurred, he would triangulate its position, factor out wind currents and natural seismic activity, and calculate its power. "Ole always pushed the edge," William Ballard, his commanding officer at the time, told me. "I wouldn't have guessed that he would become so religious. But, when he gets into something, he gets into it right up to his eyeballs."

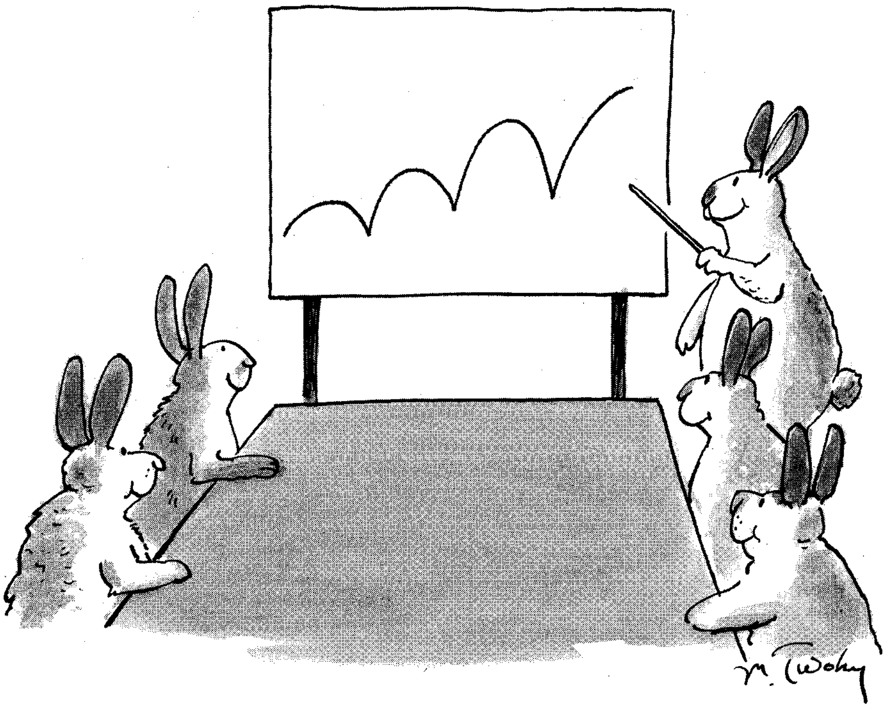
In the summer of 1958, Anthony was sent to the Marshall Islands, in the South Pacific, to calibrate his sensors against a newly designed hydrogen bomb. The Air Force had estimated that the explosion would be equivalent to 3.5 megatons of TNT, but it was equal to 9.3 megatons instead. Standing on the shore of an island thirty miles away, Anthony watched the target island disintegrate in a blinding flash. A few seconds later, the blowback hit him—a shock wave of wind and sound so powerful that it knocked him into the water.

Anthony's body still bears traces of the explosion. His blood is so marked by radiation that a doctor once told him he should be dead. His flesh is pocked with more than four hundred lipomas—hard, fatty tumors, strung under his skin like knots in a clothesline. "My body is a disaster zone," he says, but when he mentions the explosion now it's merely as a metaphor for his spiritual awakening fourteen years later. His foundation, as it turns out, is named not after the Holy Trinity but after the first nuclear device, which was detonated in New Mexico, in 1945. "God vaporized my value system the way that bomb vaporized its target," Anthony says.

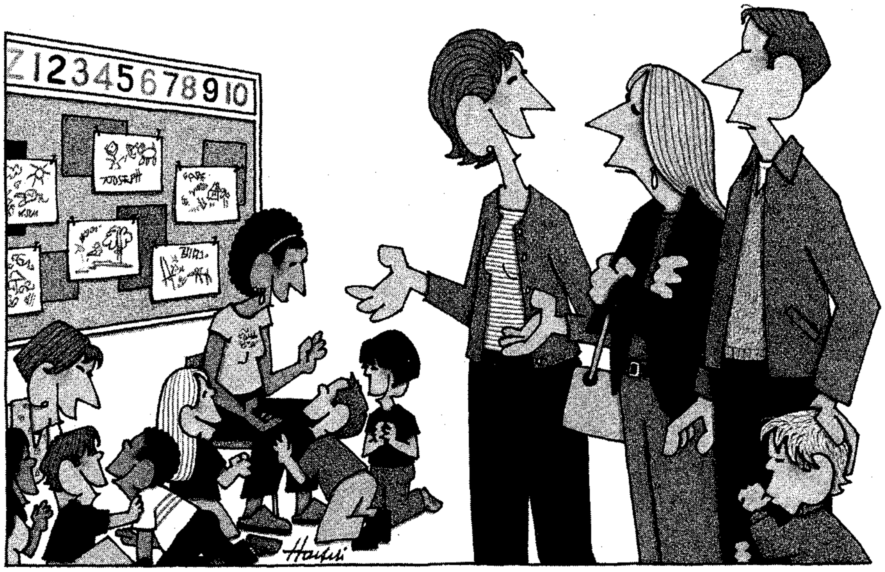
Anthony quit the military in 1959 but continued to work on nuclear detection for Teledyne, a civilian defense contractor. By the time he moved to Dallas, in 1962, he was earning more than seventy thousand dollars a year—good money for a high-school dropout. He bought a salmon-colored Cadillac Coupe De Ville and rented a twenty-first-floor apartment in the tony district of Turtle Creek. He worked as an advance man for Barry Goldwater in the 1964 Presidential election, and as the regional campaign manager for Texas Senator John Tower in 1966. "He was always with a different woman, as I remember, and she was always tall and leggy and blond," Alan Steelman, a former Texas congressman, told me. Still, Steelman thought enough of Anthony's intelligence and charisma to recruit him to run for the state legislature in 1968.

"Back then, in my district you could fit the whole Republican Party in a phone booth," Anthony says. Yet he lost the election by fewer than eight hundred votes. A year later, he was appointed to the board of directors for Dallas County's War on Poverty, an experience that he now calls a turning point in his life. He spent three months living in a housing project, just to see what he was up against. But although the experience moderated his politics—"I stopped believing in the trickle-down theory," he says—it had little effect on his life style. After helping Wes Wise get elected mayor of Dallas in 1971, he used the new mayor's well-stocked Rolodex to launch a public-relations firm called Anthony and Company. "He was a con man and a hustler—with a great wardrobe," his best friend, John Bloom, better known as Joe Bob Briggs, a redneck comedian and movie critic, later wrote. "I liked him immediately."

On the day of Anthony's conversion—January 17, 1972—he was thirty-three years old and hadn't belonged to a church in more than two decades. A few months earlier, he had been hired as a fund-raiser for an all-Christian television station called KBFI, one of the first of its kind in the country. An evangelist named Norman Grubb had been invited to speak at the station's dedication, and Anthony was in the audience. He still isn't sure what happened next. He has gone back and read Grubb's books and found much to dispute in his theology. But on that day its essential message—that all success is an illusion and all striving futile; that selflessness is the only real path to transcendence—stirred some certainty inside him. "It was like being taken into the heart of God," he says. An hour and a half later,



the other businessmen had left the auditorium, but Anthony was still in his seat, sobbing.



"We've created a safe, nonjudgmental environment that will leave your child ill prepared for real life."

Religious conversions, like rock-star documentaries, nearly always follow the same pattern: the skyrocketing success and riches without fulfillment, the fall from grace and the rise to new heights on the wings of faith. In Anthony's case, that plot has been acted out in reverse: he found religion at the pinnacle of his career and has grown steadily poorer since. God's purpose, he believes, is not to ease our pain or to answer our prayers but to strip us of all expectation—to reveal the hollowness of our existence so that we might sacrifice our lives for others, as Christ did. True faith, Anthony says, takes us as low as we can go.

It's not a message that has broad appeal. Christianity may, at heart, be a religion of charity and self-sacrifice, but few go to church to be told that their prayers are futile. The Prosperity Gospel is a far more comforting creed. Its doctrinal fine points vary from one televangelist to another (the pastor Benny Hinn, for instance, has said that each member of the Holy Trinity is himself a triune being—"That means there are nine of them!"), but its central message is fairly consistent: Poverty is just a matter of bad faith and negative thinking. God wants us to be wealthy, but only our prayers and offerings can unleash his power. When Jesus told his followers, in Mark 10:30, that they would receive "a hundredfold" what they'd given up, he meant it literally. "You give $1.00 for the gospel's sake and the full hundredfold return would be $100. Ten dollars would be $1,000. A hundredfold return on $1,000 would be $100,000," Kenneth Copeland's wife, Gloria, wrote in her book "God's Will Is Prosperity." In short, she added, "Mark 10:30 is a very good deal."

The Copelands' ministry is tangible proof of this principle, believers say. Thirty years ago, Kenneth Copeland was a pilot for Oral Roberts, the godfather of the televangelist industry. When he and his wife began teaching Bible studies in Fort Worth, their small classes quickly blossomed into full-blown revivals, then weeklong assemblies at convention centers. Today, the Copelands preside over a mega-ministry of their own, worth a hundred and fifty million dollars. Its headquarters sprawl across fifteen hundred acres of short-grass prairie forty miles west of Dallas, and include a television studio and a private airfield. The church has a sizable gift shop in the lobby, where books with titles like "No Deposit, No Return" sit next to pamphlets on "Bible cures" for cancer, ADD, and prostate problems. One shelf is devoted to videos of Copeland's homemade Westerns, in which he plays a God-fearing marshal called Wichita Slim rounding up heathens on the Texas plains. Another is full of pious exercise videos—"Bodies for Christ: Firm and Tight" is a popular title.

When I attended a service there one Wednesday night, accompanied by Trinity's lead investigator, Pete Evans, the Copelands were off on one of their crusades, and Kenneth's son-in-law George Pearsons was preaching. "I can tell you're tired tonight," he told the congregation. "But that's O.K. Just sit back and take it in." He nodded quietly for a moment, eyes shining behind gold-rimmed glasses. Then he began to amble across the stage. To his left, a five-piece electric band fell into an easy, reggae-inflected shuffle, picking up the rhythm of his stride. Behind him, a small crowd of deacons and assistant ministers swayed to the music. "I was singing a little tune to myself the other day, and I could feel myself getting lighter and lighter and lighter," Pearsons said. "It was just a simple little song, but it was spiritual. It edified." He raised the cordless microphone to his lips and began to sing, in a slightly nasal tenor. "No more thinking, I'm just drinking, drinking of the spirit. No more thinking, I'm just drinking, drinking of the new wine."

The crowd hardly looked like the singing and drinking type. The men, both black and white, wore three-piece suits or woollen sweaters with slacks; the women, flanked by well-scrubbed children, had on long dresses and strands of pearls. Soon, everyone was swaying to the music, joining in a call-and-response with the minister: "No more thinking! (No more thinking!) I'm just drinking! (I'm just drinking!)." As their voices grew louder, the band began to punch up the rhythm, sounding almost funky now, until Pearsons fell into a kind of trance. Standing center stage, he threw back his head and shouted, "*Behlehbehlehbehlehbehleh! Hulehbehlehbehlehbehleh!*" On his final note, the other deacons and ministers joined in harmony, sustaining the chord till it faded to a hush. Then Pearsons gestured for the ushers to take up the collection. "We thank you for the financial outpouring in Jesus' name," he said, looking directly at the video cameras in the balcony. "We thank you for the bills that are being supernaturally paid and the debts

"They weren't wilted before you picked them up!"

• •

that are being supernaturally forgiven."

Beside me, in the back row of the church, Pete Evans was smiling blandly, but his hands were white at the knuckles. "Here we go," he said. Evans spends a good deal of his time attending church services. He maintains files on more than three hundred televangelists, helps tape and monitor their broadcasts four hours a day, and occasionally goes undercover. (In 1994, for instance, he spent five months posing as a homeless person at a charismatic church in Spindale, North Carolina. Using a camera hidden in his book bag, he filmed church members screaming at children to exorcise their demons, and saw them strapping the children to chairs.) He is slight of build and bespectacled, with an uneven thatch of gray hair and a face shaped like a keyhole. His voice has a quiet, measured intensity, and, like most of the Trinity members I met, he can be disarmingly self-critical. Yet he's also a great fan of cop shows, and takes evident pleasure in nailing his perps.

Copeland, Pearsons, and their fellow-ministers represent a new generation of televangelists, Evans said: folksy yet sophisticated, as well versed in HTML as in Leviticus. Though they speak in tongues, they choreograph their outbursts with music. And though they still heal by the laying on of hands, they're careful not to make any actionable claims. Their preaching is plainspoken and soothing, but no less financially demanding for all that. Recently, a call for donations appeared on Copeland's Web site: he and his wife require his-and-her Cessna Citation X jets, valued at twenty million dollars apiece. "When God tells Kenneth to travel to South Africa and hold a three-day Victory Campaign, he won't have to wait to make commercial travel arrangements," the Web site explains. "He can just climb aboard his Citation X and go!"

After the offering, men and women began lining up in front of the stage to receive Pearsons's healing touch. As he made his way down the row, a trio of thickly built deacons, wearing earbud headphones, gathered behind each believer in turn. Pearsons would clasp someone's face and murmur a blessing, then step back as he or she collapsed into the deacons' arms, slain by the spirit. Soon people were sprawled all over the floor, and female ushers were covering their legs demurely with small blankets. The more people Pearsons slew, the wilder his gestures became, until he was merely slapping believers on the forehead and moving on. When a pair of deacons finally led him away, his face was flushed and beaded with sweat, and his whole body was shaking with what charismatics call "holy laughter."

"That's the shtick," Evans said, surveying the fallen. "He gives them an extra little shove sometimes, just to get them to go down." Still, he admitted, the service had almost moved him. Most of Pearsons's sermon was quoted straight from the Bible, and his performance had an instinctive appeal. "When he started singing and the band started picking it up, I had the urge to sing and dance right along with him," Evans said. "That's what everybody's looking for: spontaneity, peace of mind, freedom of expression. You could feel the excitement in the room." He shook his head. "But here's the test: Can you be at peace when things aren't going your way? When the healings aren't working and the riches aren't pouring in? The danger with guys like this is that they mislead people into believing that suffering is strange. That if you're suffering you're not following the will of God. But that's not the way life works for anybody."

When Evans first joined Trinity, in 1974, he was nineteen years old and studying at Austin College, in Sherman, Texas. His mother was a youth counsellor at a Presbyterian church and was later ordained. She had taught him that every word in the Bible is holy, and that a good Christian should be nice to everyone. Then, a month or two before Pete left for college, his mother ran off with the church pastor, who also happened to be their neighbor's husband. Afterward, the pastor sent Pete and his two younger sisters a long, bitter letter enumerating their sins. By then, "the idea of not having to be nice appealed to me," Evans says. "The idea of not acting anymore, of stark honesty, of just being me."

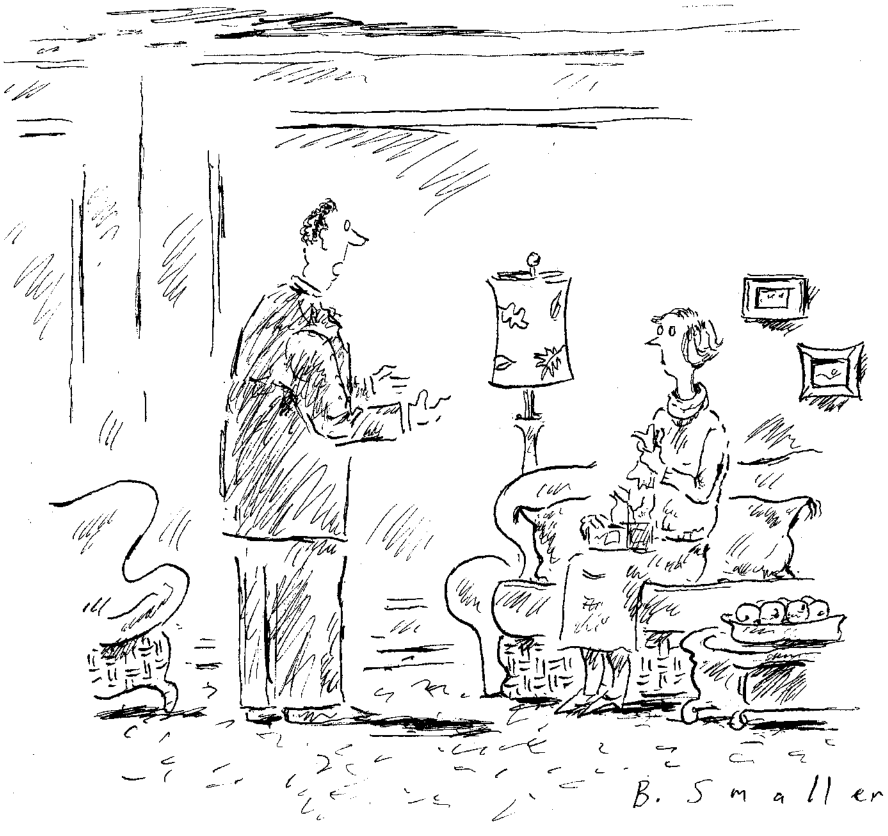
Late one night, Evans was in his bedroom listening to FM radio when a religious talk show came on the air. It was called "One Trinity Place," and the host was Ole Anthony. Evans had never heard anyone talk about God the way Anthony did. The show's guests were celebrity Christians or just plain celebrities—Jim Bakker, Billy Graham, Johnny Mathis, Frank Sinatra—but Anthony had no stomach for pious small talk. His questions were biting, irreverent. He made quick work of his own failings, then set about exposing theirs. Evans listened to Anthony every night after that, and eventually invited him to speak to his theology class. "He kind of blew everybody away," he says. To Anthony, conflict and sorrow were God's conduits to the real, and the Gospels were just commentary. "He held up a Bible and said, 'You can burn this book, because these are just words about the Word,' " Evans recalls. " 'The true Word is in your heart.' "

For a while after his conversion, Anthony had tried to work in television. He left his public-relations company and began hosting a show on KBFI, the religious television station he'd helped launch. In less than a year, however, the station was bought by Pat Robertson and Anthony's show was cancelled. He appeared as a guest once on "The 700 Club," but he wasn't invited back. ("I told them that God should either send me a wife or stop condemning fornication as a sin," he says.) In the fall of 1972, Anthony founded Trinity with the help of two other Dallas businessmen, both of whom are now dead, hoping to raise money for Christian causes. The foundation funded youth ministries for troubled teens, produced Anthony's radio talk show, and organized a benefit concert headlined by Pat Boone and Andraé Crouch and the Disciples. Once again, though, things quickly went bust. The corporate underwriter for the concert backed out at the last minute, leaving the foundation in debt before it was really in business.

By the time Evans met him, Anthony was essentially homeless. Trinity could afford to pay him only twenty dollars a week, so he gave up his apartment and spent his nights sleeping on the floor of the foundation's office, above a carpet store in a strip mall. He spent his days at Southern Methodist University's theology library, translating the Bible and reading Martin Luther, until he was kicked out. Then he moved to Temple Emanu-El, in north-central Dallas, where he read Kabbalah and debated scholars, earning the affectionate nickname "the Gentile rabbi." For early Christians, he came to believe, after poring over religious calendars, their faith had a kind of stereophonic depth. Every major event in the Gospels seemed to fall on or near a Jewish holy day: Christ's birth on Rosh Hashanah, his baptism on Yom Kippur, his crucifixion on Passover. Eventually, Anthony organized a Bible study along the same lines: a small group of believers, around the size of a minyan (no fewer than ten), who are dedicated to parsing Scripture, verse by verse, according to the Jewish calendar.

"He thought it could be a businessmen's breakfast," Anthony's friend John Bloom told me. "He was a big Republican, and he thought he would get all those guys. But that wasn't who showed up. Who showed up were the scum of the earth, as Ole used to call them. All these hippies and people who had never worn a suit in their lives. And of course they all had problems." Anthony would try to keep the discussion scholarly. He would open the Talmud or the Torah, turn to some cryptic line, and start to tease out its meaning with his Greek and Hebrew dictionaries. Then things would fall apart. "It's a strange fact, but when you study the Scripture seriously it brings out all this stuff in people," Bloom says. "You'd think you were going to read the Book of Ephesians and suddenly someone was saying, 'Oh, my crack-addicted sister came over last night and slapped my daughter.' And that's what you ended up dealing with."

Bloom calls this the "fistfight stage of Trinity Foundation." He was working as a writer for *Texas Monthly* at the time, in an office across the hall in the same strip mall, and became fascinated by Anthony—his bizarre life style and utter lack of concern about it, his foul mouth and fervent theology. "He was relentless," Bloom later wrote in a Dallas magazine. "He was a charging Brahma bull breathing Scripture out of both nostrils." Late at night, when Bloom was writing on deadline, he'd sometimes hear shouting and the sound of furniture being thrown around across the hall, followed by slamming doors and squealing tires. Later, at some local dive, he'd ask An-



"I thought we were soul mates, too, so imagine my surprise to find that my actual soul mate is Nicole in accounting."

thony what all the ruckus was about. "Romans. We're still studying the Book of Romans," Anthony would tell him.

> "What specific aspect of Romans is causing this level of interest?"
>
> "Well, we were talking about your place in the body of Christ. And I told one guy his place was to be a pimple on the ass of the body of Christ. I just said it. It just came out."
>
> "And he didn't agree?"
>
> "A lot of these people are clinging to their miserable little self-images. They don't understand that it's about God. It's about them, but only the part of them that contains God. They still think they're special."

Anthony's crankiness was oddly consistent with his theology. In the first century, his studies suggested, new believers were ritually rebuffed three times before they were allowed to join Christian communities, so he strove for the same effect. "Nobody is trying to sell God here," he told me. "In fact, I'm trying to do the opposite—I'm trying to kick people out." He insisted on absolute honesty in his Bible study, and he took literally the Biblical injunction "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." The sessions would roll on hour after hour, cycling through confession, self-justification, anger, and regret. At least twice Anthony's life was threatened, and once he jumped into his car vowing never to return. (He later remembered that the car belonged to Trinity.) During one meeting, a normally sweet-natured man who wrote for the Dallas *Morning News* socked Evans in the mouth, chipping a tooth.

Evans got over it. As fractious as the meetings were, they were also exhilarating. Anthony, for all his orneriness, took the people's sorrow seriously. He treated it as indispensable—as profoundly revelatory—rather than merely inconvenient. "I know it sounds dramatic, but there was this sense that you were fulfilling your destiny," Evans says. "That you were in exactly the place you needed to be, at exactly the right time."

Every once in a while, some solid citizen would show up and inevitably get scared off by the "hippie feel of the place," Bloom says. Others stayed for a few months or a year and then went back to their old lives—to their families or prison-furlough programs, suburban homes or the street. But there were always a few to take their place. A gifted musician named John Rutledge showed up in 1975, after his marriage fell apart, and went on to write most of the group's folk-flavored hymns. Bloom joined a number of years later, after a near-fatal car wreck led to his own conversion. At one point, a man named Doug Duncan brought in a list of pointed questions from the organization Cult Watch, and read them out loud at a meeting. "You know what a cult is?" Anthony told him. "It's a place where someone tells you what to do in the name of God. If I ever tell anyone what to do around here, they should shoot me." Duncan ended up staying for twenty-five years, leading his own Bible-study group when Anthony's grew too large.

By the late nineteen-eighties, the members of the Trinity community had settled in East Dallas—one of the few places they could afford—and Anthony had noticed a trend. The new arrivals still tended to be down on their luck, but for some of them the crippling blow had come from religion itself. Harry Guetzlaff, a filmmaker and former marketing executive for Coca-Cola, was a typical example. When his projects went belly-up and his wife divorced him, he gave his last five thousand dollars to Robert Tilton, a self-proclaimed Prophet of Prosperity with a daily television show called "Success-N-Life." Tilton was famous for his waved silver hair, his wacky antics onscreen—shadowboxing with the Devil, babbling holy baby talk—and for the unabashed greed of his preaching. "It made perfect sense at the time," Guetzlaff told me. "I believed that God was active in my life, and Tilton was saying, 'Give me a buck and God will give you back a hundred.' I needed some snake oil, and he had some snake oil to sell."

It was near midnight, an hour or two after the service at the Copelands' church, when Evans pulled into a deserted parking lot and switched off the headlights. The sky was streaked with racing cirrus clouds, and the empty streets glowed with rain and reflected neon. Evans reached into his backpack, pulled out a pair of surgical gloves, and slipped them on. Then he led me into a patch of scraggly trees. A small office stood at the bottom of the hill, its plate-glass windows dimly lit from within. I could just make out the bookshelves and panelled walls of what looked like a lawyer's office. Evans made his way to a cinder-block bunker just below it, with a six-by-five-foot industrial Dumpster inside. "I know Brewer's office is in that building, but I don't want to know if that's it," he said, glancing up. He was referring to Dennis Brewer, Sr., an attorney who has represented several local televangelists, including Copeland and Hinn, whose trash he was there to plunder. "It would just make me more nervous," he said. Then he slid open a door in the Dumpster and stepped inside.

Trinity's approach to detective work hasn't changed much since 1988, when it began to investigate Robert Tilton after hearing Guetzlaff's stories. Tilton had the fastest-growing ministry in the country by then, with more than eighty million dollars a year in donations. He owned or had personal access to several lavish "parsonages," one of which was worth four and a half million dollars, and a hundred-and-thirty-two-thousand-dollar yacht. Yet his ministry, like any other church, was exempt from most federal and state taxes. Anthony tried to complain to the National Religious Broadcasters association and to the district attorney's office, but he was told that religious claims—however cynical or extravagant—are strictly protected by the First Amendment. With no budget for surveillance equipment and no legal access to his targets' files, he could only follow the paper trail. Much of Tilton's success had come through direct mail—Trinity, ironically, was on his mailing list—so Anthony asked Guetzlaff to trace the letters to their source.

Two months later, Anthony showed up at the offices of Response Media, Inc., the marketing firm in Tulsa that handled Tilson's mailings. He had sent the firm a proposal that he had written for a talk show on the Fox network, and told the staff there that he needed some help with the mailings. At the same time, he had been in contact with Diane Sawyer, the co-anchor of the ABC news show "PrimeTime Live." Sawyer had become intrigued by Tilton while watching his antics on cable one night. After vetting Trinity, she had agreed to collaborate on an investigation. On the day Anthony went to visit Response Media, he was accompanied by two "media consultants": a cameraman from "PrimeTime Live," who had a video lens hidden in his glasses, and a producer for the show, who had concealed a microphone and a video recorder in her purse. For the next two hours, they documented just how well the psychology of direct mail—with its crude manipulation of curiosity, expectation, habit, and obligation—was suited to religion.

"New names is the key. Just think, New names," Jim Moore, the president of Response Media, told Anthony. The firm began by gathering the addresses of hundreds of thousands of Tilton's followers. Then ghostwriters put together a series of direct-mail packages. Some packages contained prayer cloths (a red one for healing, a blue one for miracles, a green one for financial breakthroughs) that Tilton promised to anoint if they were sent back to him. Others contained plastic angels and outlines of Tilton's feet for donors to stand on while praying. Whenever someone sent in a pledge and a prayer request, he received a personal reply from Tilton, mentioning his problem specifically and promising to talk to God about it. Then he received a bill for the pledge.

As the letters from donors poured in, they were bundled together in Dallas and sent to a bank in downtown Tulsa, Moore explained. But he couldn't, or wouldn't, say what happened next. How did Tilton handle the prayer requests—thousands of them a day? Anthony and Guetzlaff made fourteen trips to Tulsa over the next thirty days. They rented rooms in a fleabag motel and began raiding Dumpsters behind Response Media, Tilton's lawyer's office, and the bank downtown. At the bank, they found a series of deposit slips that led to a branch bank in a Tulsa suburb. From there, they tailed a delivery van to a company called Internal Data Management, and yet another Dumpster. Every night, they hauled an average of sixty bags of garbage back to the motel. "At first, I had Harry sleep with it," Anthony says. "Then we finally got a room just for the trash. The televangelists call me a garbologist, and to do garbology correctly is an art."

Sifting through the pizza scraps, crumpled invoices, and coffee-stained spreadsheets, they slowly pieced together Tilton's "Wheel of Fortune," as Anthony later called it. The letters made their way

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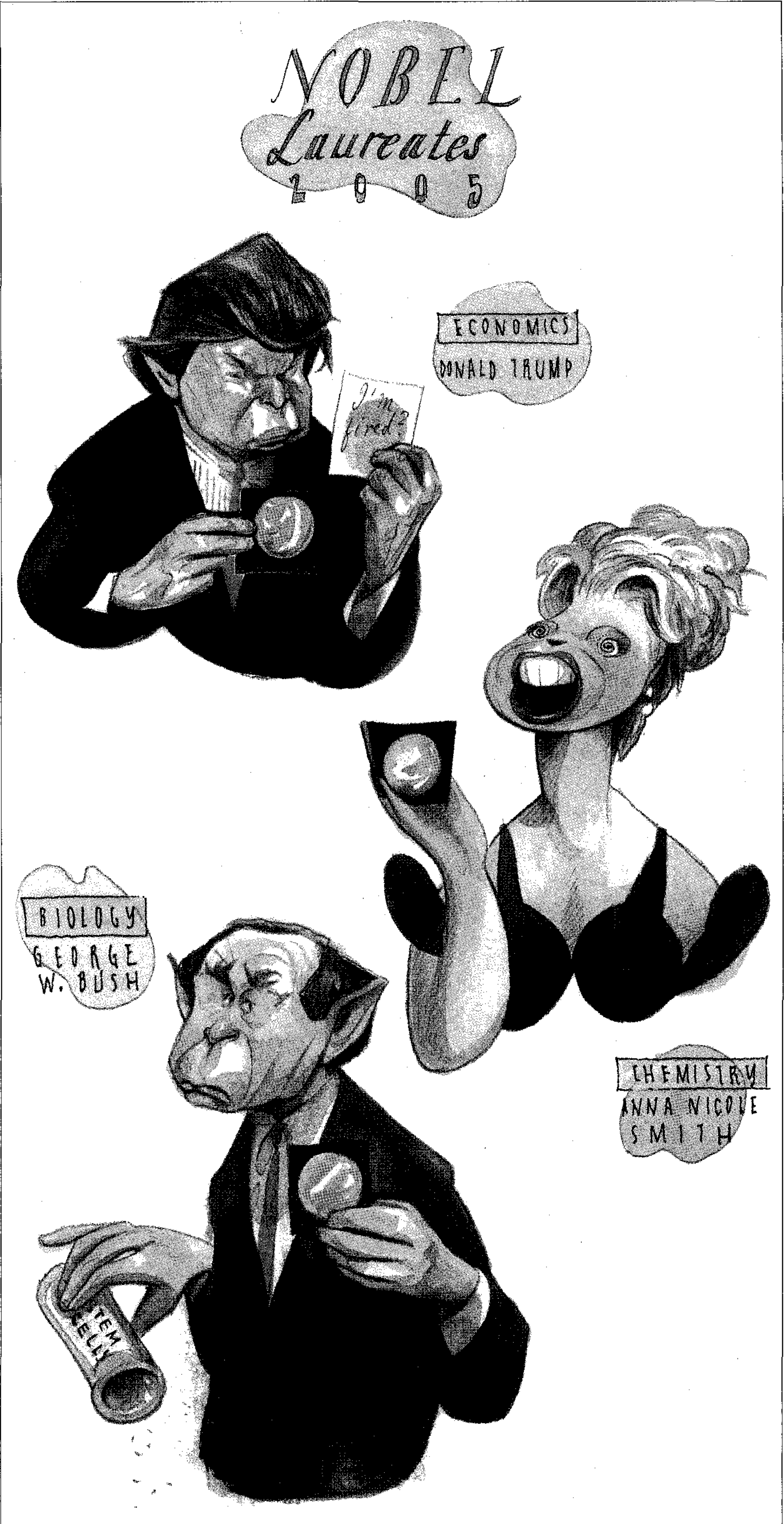
SKETCHBOOK BY STEVE BRODNER

"You know, you've got fans, and 99.9 percent of them are great—0.1 percent are jerks. . . . I'm trying to be positive. I'm a big fan of the Nobel Peace Prize."

—*Ron Artest in an interview with People.*



from Dallas to the main bank to the branch bank, where they were opened and stripped of donations. The prayer requests were then read by Internal Data Management employees, who summarized their contents with a simple code ("JBS" for "job needed," for instance, or "BAR" for "barren wife"; "PCA" for "rebellious child" or "FON" for "Bob, pls call me"). The codes were entered into computers and used to generate personalized form letters from Tilton. Anthony and Guetzlaff found thousands of prayer requests in the Dumpster behind the branch bank. One of them, which Anthony keeps in his wallet, was from a woman whose son had lost his job. If he didn't find work, she said, he might commit suicide. "I couldn't believe the callousness of this whole mechanized operation," Anthony says.

"PrimeTime Live" aired a series of exposés on Tilton, based on Trinity's research. The minister fought back from his pulpit and on his own show. He sued ABC and Trinity, accusing the network of yellow journalism and calling Anthony a liar, a drunkard, and a womanizer. He said that he had never preached poverty to anyone—"I ain't supposed to have nothin'? Get that religious garbage out of your brain!"—and that handling his donors' letters had become hazardous to his health. "I laid on top of those prayer requests so much that the chemicals actually got into my bloodstream, began to swell the capillaries," he said. "It got into my immune system, and I had two small strokes in my brain that brought about some numbness in my body."

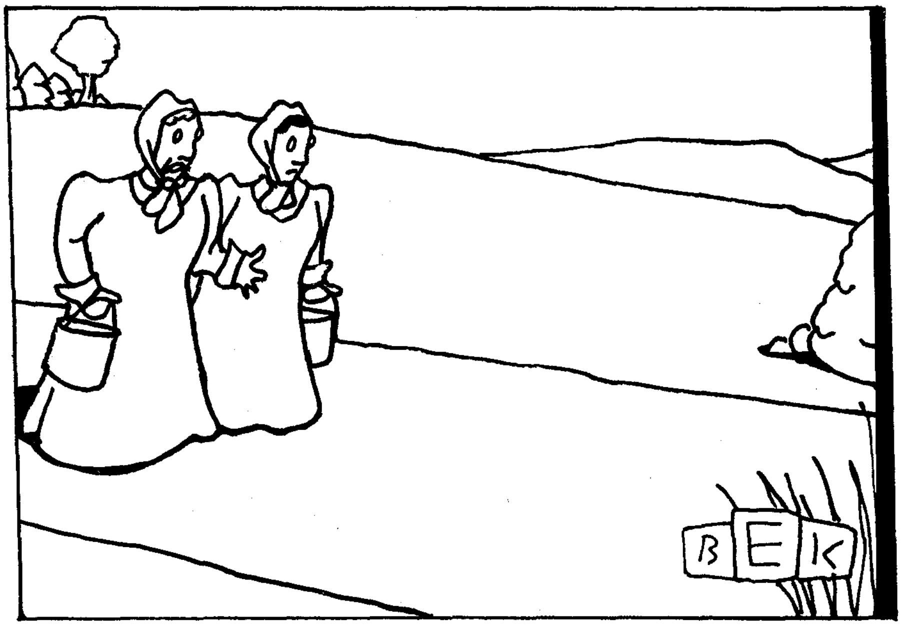
Less than two years later, Tilton's show was off the air and his wife had divorced him. In 1999, a decade after Anthony's investigation began, Tilton's Word of Faith Family Church was sold. "And I'll tell you something, you pastors and parishioners," he had warned on his show. "You don't know when Ole's going to get after *you*."

Televangelists have grown savvier since then, Evans told me on the night of our Dumpster raid. Most now shred their documents or lock their garbage behind iron gates. "It's a bunker mentality," he said. He shined the beam of his flashlight around the Dumpster's rusted interior. He'd been rooting around for half an hour without any luck. The garbage bags reeked of stale refried beans and leaked unsavory fluids. "I've got some really bad stuff on me," he said, aiming his light at something gray and viscous on his shoe. "I hope it's paint." Then his eyes fell on a bag in the corner. He waded over to it, fished out a typewritten sheet, and held it up to the flashlight. The letterhead was Brewer's. "All right," he said. "We've got a keeper." He wrenched the bag loose from the pile, then high-stepped out of the Dumpster and headed back into the trees.

TOO EARLY TO BEGIN WORKING ON
TOO LATE TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT

The next morning at seven-thirty, nine or ten Trinity members were huddled over coffee in the dining hall, waiting for Anthony's Bible study to start. A pale, wheat-colored sun slanted through the blinds, hatching the room in shadows and dusty light. Across the room, Ronnie Dunbar and Jim Petty sat side by side like a photograph and its negative. Dunbar was black and squarely built, with a brooding manner and a carefully shaved head. He had been H.I.V. positive for eighteen years but had yet to show any symptoms. Petty was skinny, white, and easily spooked. He had craggy features and fidgety eyes, like an old-time mountain man who'd seen one too many cougars. Both were homeless and alcoholic when they first came to Trinity more than a decade ago, and both have had bouts with drugs or alcohol since then. To my left, Evans looked as if he'd never left the Dumpster—his hair was matted on one side and stuck out on the other. He'd been sharing a twelve-by-twelve room with Dunbar and was getting a little tired of it. A few days earlier, Evans told me, he jokingly prayed, "God, when I was asking for a wife, I wasn't asking for Ronnie."

The only face in the room that looked fully awake belonged to Frank Bono, a former Wall Street broker who helps manage Trinity's finances. Frank and his wife, Annabelle (I've changed their names at their request), are "Levites": members of Trinity's full-time staff who take a vow of poverty and earn fifty-five dollars a week. He has sharp, raw-skinned features, a stiff bristle of gray hair, and a voice with the pace and muted precision of a stenography machine. Six years ago, he belonged to a Dallas country club, drove a Mercedes and a Porsche, and owned a condominium in Siesta Key, Florida. Then, in the winter of 2000, he was indicted for securities fraud. Facing eighteen months in a federal prison (he eventually served eleven), with no means of supporting his wife and their two daughters, he placed a call to Anthony, whom he had met only once or twice. "I'll never forget our conversation," Bono told me. "When I explained my situation, there was silence for about ten seconds. Then Ole said, 'It's easy. Pack everything you own in a van and bring it here.' I said, 'Ole, I don't want to be a burden.' And he said, 'I don't have any burdens.' "



"Do all boys go through a beanstalk phase?"

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Anthony was sitting at the far end of the room, feet propped on a chair, a wooden cane within arm's reach. Mornings are his best time—his only good time, really—but even then his face is often haggard with pain. Twenty-five years ago, he sat down in a steam room at his health club, tucked his legs under the bench, and touched his left heel to a live wire that a workman had left hanging from the wall. The shock threw his head back so hard that he cracked a joint in his jaw, and seared the nerve endings on his left side, from ankle to ear. Heavy doses of relaxants and various misguided therapies have only exacerbated the condition over the years, so that Anthony now spends much of the day in his bedroom, racked with muscle spasms.

"Peace is really what we're searching for," he said, swivelling his fierce gaze around the room. "But a life without suffering is meaningless. We are like hunks of quartz, and our real identity is a vein of gold inside it. Whenever we prefer someone's interest over our own, whenever we lay down our lives for someone, we knock off some of the quartz and reveal the gold." Anthony has never expected his preaching to become popular. "It costs you your hopes and dreams," he says. But he believes that if just a few more people in every community shared his values they could transform society. There are some three hundred thousand churches in the United States and, on any given night, some six hundred thousand homeless people. If every church could adopt just one or two of the homeless, he says, a seemingly intractable problem might be solved.

The Dallas Project, as Anthony's brainstorm came to be called, was the flip side of Trinity's televangelist work: it was a gesture of faith in organized religion. Anthony launched the project at a press conference in 1988, then went around Dallas with other Trinity members pitching it to churches. In each congregation, they suggested, a core group of ten to twenty members should form a kind of extended family for one homeless person, housing, feeding, and taking care of him with the church's support. The project received admiring notices in the local press and eventually prompted a letter from the White House. "Word has reached me of your outstanding record of community service," President George H. W. Bush wrote. "Barbara joins me in wishing you every success as you continue to set a fine example for your friends and neighbors."

The friends and neighbors in question, however, hadn't quite got the message: instead of housing the homeless themselves, most local churches simply sent them to Trinity. "I'd be over there visiting," John Bloom recalls, "and three more of them would show up from the First Baptist Church. I'd be, like, 'The First Baptist Church! That's the biggest church in Texas!' And Ole would say, 'Well, they say they don't have any room for them.' " At around the same time, a couple of judges who knew Anthony from his political days began sending him young probationers, thinking that Trinity might offer an easier transition back into society. Anthony would interview the new arrivals and place the diciest ones in private rooms or with single adults. The rest were distributed among Trinity's families.

In 1988 alone, more than forty homeless people made their way to Trinity. Boarders would come home so deliriously high they had to be taken to a hotel, or so raging drunk the police had to be called. In the past, when someone got out of hand the whole community would help deal with him. ("We knew they couldn't kill all of us," John Rutledge's son Johnny told me.) Now everyone had a domestic crisis to quell. The low point, for John Rutledge, was when a neighbor with AIDS overdosed on cocaine and vomited all over his apartment. "I was getting ready to clean it up, putting on rubber gloves to keep from getting infected by his bodily fluids," Rutledge told me. "And I remember thinking, How did I get to this place? If this is about laying down my life for someone else, I've gone about as far as I want to go."

More than any of Anthony's schemes, the Dallas Project laid bare the contradictions at the heart of his theology. He believes that suffering brings us closer to God, yet he devotes his life to alleviating it. He believes all earthly striving is pointless, yet he pleads his case on talk shows and on "PrimeTime Live." He wants Trinity to start a revolution, but he doesn't think the world is much worth fighting over. In the Gospels, Christ's last statement on the Cross is "It is finished," and Anthony takes him at his cosmic Word: mortal life, in a messianic age, is just a play of shadows in a shadow box; our only true purpose is to locate the divine within us. "Can you get it in your heads—is there some way it can penetrate—that today you are seated in Heaven, on the mercy seat?" he asked his Bible-study group that morning. "There is nothing left for you to do, no career path to fulfill you. Your warfare is over."

MIRROR

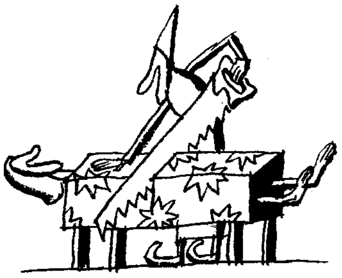
A white room and a party going on
and I was standing with some friends
under a large gilt-framed mirror
that tilted slightly forward
over the fireplace.
We were drinking whiskey
and some of us, feeling no pain,
were trying to decide
what precise shade of yellow
the setting sun turned our drinks.
I closed my eyes briefly,
then looked up into the mirror:
a woman in a green dress leaned
against the far wall.
She seemed distracted,
the fingers of one hand
fidgeted with her necklace,
and she was staring into the mirror,
not at me but past me, into a space

Why, then, waste time exposing televangelists? Why bother caring for the homeless? The easy answer, Anthony says, is that Christ would have wanted us to. "Whatever you do unto the least of my brethren, you do unto me," Jesus told his disciples. But Anthony knows that his motives aren't always so humble. "My own grandiose bullshit can get in the way," he told me one afternoon, sitting in the converted sunroom that serves as his office. Along the wall beside him, a sagging bookcase held well-thumbed volumes of the Talmud and the Zohar, as well as ring binders full of his Bible translations. Beside it, in the window, a red-breasted lovebird twittered in a wooden cage. "I can start to think that this is the way to solve the world's problems," he said. "But it's just B.S. It's just nothing. I was a schemer and a promoter. That's just the way my mind works."

Outside, on the brick patio behind the house, the garbage taken from Dennis Brewer's Dumpster was spread out on a blue tarp, drying in the sun. Evans was crouched over it in a black T-shirt. "If I see coffee stains, it usually means I'm getting close to something good," he said. There were a few references to Robert Tilton and Benny Hinn, but nothing really incriminating. Trinity's cases tend to accrete slowly, Evans said, but even Anthony's opponents agree that he usually gets his man.

"Give the Devil his due: he does a tremendous job of getting his cases together," Dennis Brewer told me. Brewer doesn't fault Anthony for inaccuracy so much as arrogance and indiscretion. "Of course there are bad apples," he says. "It was that way in Bible times, too. David committed adultery and had Bathsheba's husband murdered on the front lines. But God doesn't need Ole Anthony to chastise them. He can do that rebuking himself, and he can do it on a private basis, where it doesn't bring down the church." Brewer says that he and other born-again Christians don't mind the opulent lives televangelists lead, and that Anthony is motivated by pure envy. "He had aspirations of high and mighty, rich and famous things, and I think through failure and bitterness he has become a professional critic. The Word says that we will know them by their fruit, and his fruit is shrivelled up and sour."

Trinity's cynicism is best exemplified, Brewer and other critics say, by its bimonthly magazine, *The Door*. First published in 1971, by a Christian youth ministry in California, *The Door* was named after the church door in Wittenberg, Germany, on which Martin Luther posted the ninety-five theses that triggered the Reformation. When Trinity inherited the magazine, nine years ago, it was a favorite among seminarians for its subversive wit and its interviews with theologians. The current editor, Robert Darden, is a Trinity supporter who teaches writing at Baylor. He has tried to preserve the magazine's spirit, but Trinity's investigations sometimes introduce a strident, acerbic tone. Mild satires like "Harry Potter in the Lake of Fire" now alternate with cover stories on Pat Robertson, "Lifetime Loser," or on Charlton Heston as a "Christian Soldier of Fortune," dressed as Moses with a machine gun.



The low point, even Trinity members now say, came when *The Door* set its sights on W. V. Grant, a local faith healer who presided over a five-thousand-seat church. In 1996, after a two-year investigation by the foundation, Grant was sentenced to sixteen months in prison and ordered to pay three hundred and fifty-three thousand dollars in back taxes, in addition to a fine. Afterward, to celebrate the conviction, Anthony insisted on publishing a *Playboy*-style centerfold of a picture that a Trinity investigator had found. It showed Grant standing at a window, buck naked and uncommonly hairy. If Darden hadn't

that might be filled by someone
yet to arrive, who at that moment
could be starting the journey
which would lead eventually to her.
Then, suddenly, my friends
said it was time to move on
to the next party.
This was years ago,
and though I have forgotten
where we went and who we all were,
I still recall that moment of looking up
and seeing the woman stare past me
into a place I could only imagine,
and each time it is with a pang,
as if just then I were stepping
from the depths of the mirror
into that white room, breathless and eager,
only to discover too late
that she is not there.

—*Mark Strand*

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objected strenuously, Anthony would have added a caption in large print: "Even the hairs on his ass are numbered."

He was wrong, of course; no amount of bad press can keep a good televangelist down. Robert Tilton has a new show on cable TV, and Benny Hinn recently held a crusade in India for nearly five million people. Even Jimmy Swaggart, whose visits to prostitutes once shook the religious right, now broadcasts his show to more than fifty countries. Though Christ was anything but ambivalent on the subject of the wealthy ("It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven"), there has never been a shortage of people to contradict him. You can hear their voices echoed in the Bible, when Paul rails against those who presume that "gain is godliness," or in the words of then Enron executive Kenneth Lay. "Throughout my life, things have fallen into place that turned out to be the right thing to do at the time," Lay told *The Door*, in an interview conducted shortly before his company went bankrupt. "I am convinced that God was—and is—guiding all the way."

On the Sunday morning before I left Dallas, Evans and I drove down I-30 to visit W. V. Grant's new church—a plate-glass plaza that was once a used-car dealership. In his heyday, Grant was a master of medicine-show flimflam, pulling strangers from crowds and guessing their ailments using crib sheets from his assistants. (Trinity found several such sheets in a Dumpster, scribbled with lines like "Dorothy, ulcer, asked to be closer to new clinic.") Prison hadn't changed his style much. After a warmup act by the Prophetess Gloria Van Johnson—a pint-size Janis Joplin who promised to anoint our checkbooks with "prosperity oil"—Grant jogged out of the wings and up the aisle, grabbing a microphone as he went. His face was flushed and jowly, his black hair so perfectly coiffed that it seemed to levitate above his brow. "Reach out and tell your neighbor, 'I'm in love with a two-thousand-year-old Jewish man!' " he shouted. The congregation dutifully obeyed.

Grant went on to deliver a short sermon, in language that was equal parts King James and "Petticoat Junction," then crooned a few numbers and commenced with the healings. He told one woman that she had a water-retention problem and an underactive thyroid. He told another that her mother-in-law, Rita, was an instrument of the Devil. "But, Chantel—is that your name? God's gonna put a hook in Rita's jaw and yank her away! I'm gonna break the Devil's principality, Chantel! I'm gonna break it right now!" He touched his fingertips to her forehead like a revolver—"*Okapatashavehpatapa!*"—and watched her collapse. Evans had an aisle seat, where all the action seemed to be. For a moment, it seemed that Grant would pass him by. Then, suddenly, the minister's hand shot out and seized the top of Evans's head. He kept it there for a moment, like a bird of prey roosting on a stump, but something in Evans's face must have unnerved him. Grant smiled quickly and asked him how he was doing, then slowly released his grip.

"I didn't care too much for that," Evans told me later, driving home. But when I asked about the rest of Grant's performance, he grinned and shook his head. "He's back in swing," he said. "He's back in full evangelical swing." All the old con men return eventually, he said, and some never really leave. After the wave of televangelist scandals in the early nineties, the Federal Communications Commission considered a truth-in-advertising clause for religious solicitations. If a televangelist declared, on the air, that he had cured a donor's cancer or tripled his bank account, that claim would have to be verifiable. Anthony made three trips to Washington to lobby for the change, and was told that it was certain to pass. Then, in 1994, the Republicans won control of the House, thanks in part to the religious right, and the measure was quietly tabled.

"I think my investigations will step up before they step down," Evans told me. "I can imagine doing this at Trinity when I'm seventy years old." As for Anthony, he's sometimes tempted to leave everything behind and live in the desert like a medieval hermit—perhaps with his friend John Bloom in the cave next door. The only thing holding him back is his own evil nature.

"I couldn't be a believer outside this community," he said, when I stopped by his office to say goodbye. "I know my own greed and my need to be right." He leaned back in his chair and glanced around the room, at the peeling paint and the twittering bird and the books full of words about the Word. "I own nothing, I have nothing, and I make fifty-five dollars a week," he said. "I'm sixty-six years old, and I have no privacy and no retirement plan. I am a blithering idiot by my own definition." He shrugged. "The mystery is, this place satisfies every desire of my heart." ♦

ANNALS OF MEDICINE

THE BELL CURVE

What happens when patients find out how good their doctors really are?

BY ATUL GAWANDE

Every illness is a story, and Annie Page's began with the kinds of small, unexceptional details that mean nothing until seen in hindsight. Like the fact that, when she was a baby, her father sometimes called her Little Potato Chip, because her skin tasted salty when he kissed her. Or that Annie's mother noticed that her breathing was sometimes a little wheezy, though the pediatrician heard nothing through his stethoscope.

The detail that finally mattered was Annie's size. For a while, Annie's fine-boned petiteness seemed to be just a family trait. Her sister, Lauryn, four years older, had always been at the bottom end of the pediatrician's growth chart for girls her age. By the time Annie was three years old, however, she had fallen off the chart. She stood an acceptable thirty-four inches tall but weighed only twenty-three pounds—less than ninety-eight per cent of girls her age. She did not look malnourished, but she didn't look quite healthy, either.

"Failure to thrive" is what it's called, and there can be scores of explanations: pituitary disorders, hypothyroidism, genetic defects in metabolism, inflammatory-bowel disease, lead poisoning, H.I.V., tapeworm infection. In textbooks, the complete list is at least a page long. Annie's doctor did a thorough workup. Then, at four o'clock on July 27, 1997—"I'll never forget that day," her mother, Honor, says—the pediatrician called the Pages at home with the results of a sweat test.

It's a strange little test. The skin on the inside surface of a child's forearm is cleaned and dried. Two small gauze pads are applied—one soaked with pilocarpine, a medicine that makes skin sweat, and the other with a salt solution. Electrodes are hooked up. Then a mild electric current is turned on for five minutes, driving the pilocarpine into the skin. A reddened, sweaty area about an inch in diameter appears on the skin, and a collection pad of dry filter paper is taped over it to absorb the sweat for half an hour. A technician then measures the concentration of chloride in the pad.

Over the phone, the doctor told Honor that her daughter's chloride level was far higher than normal. Honor is a hospital pharmacist, and she had come across children with abnormal results like this. "All I knew was that it meant she was going to die," she said quietly when I visited the Pages' home, in the Cincinnati suburb of Loveland. The test showed that Annie had cystic fibrosis.

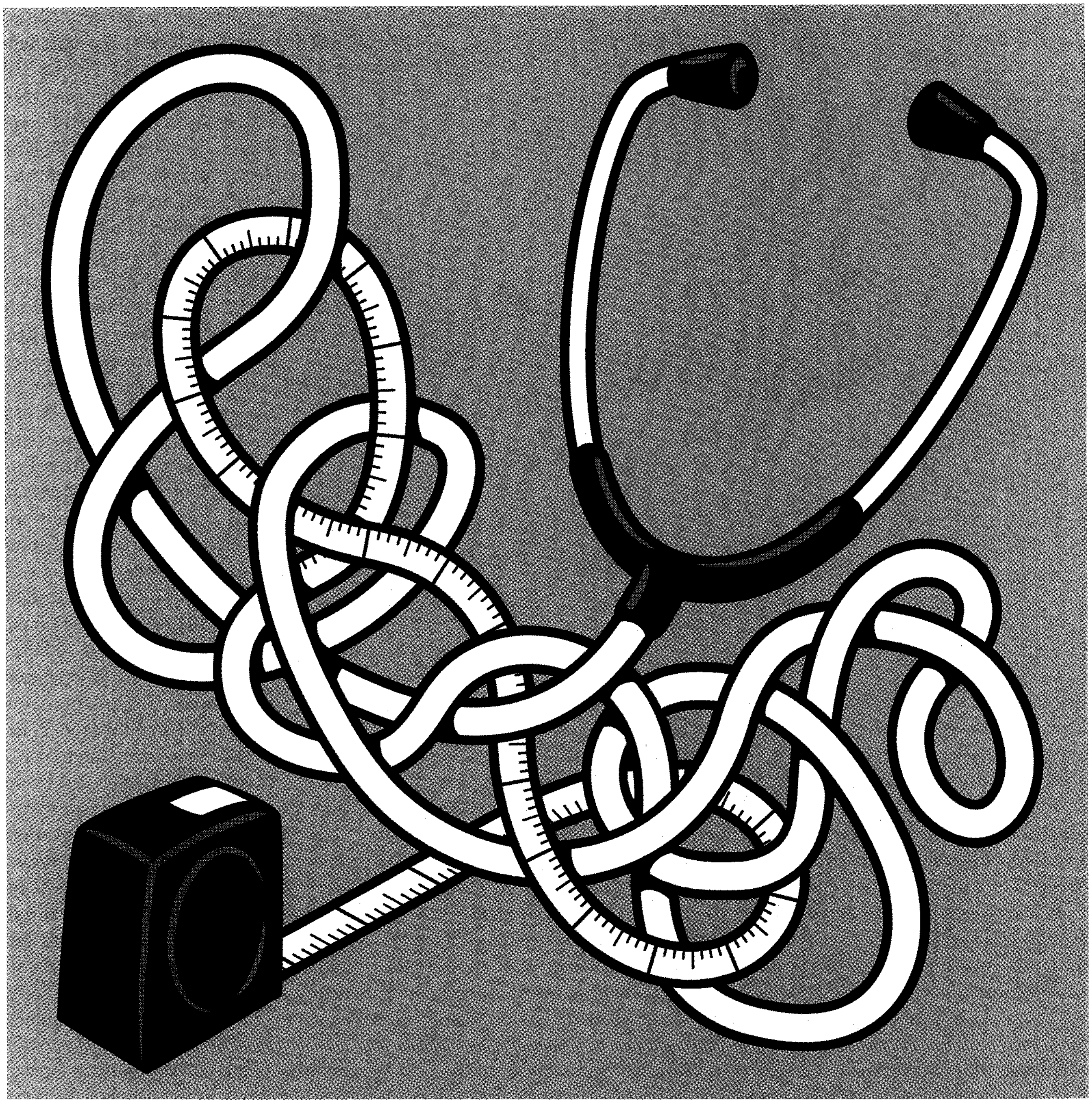
Cystic fibrosis is a genetic disease. Only a thousand American children per year are diagnosed as having it. Some ten million people in the United States carry the defective gene, but the disorder is recessive: a child will develop the condition only if both parents are carriers and both pass on a copy. The gene—which was discovered, in 1989, sitting out on the long arm of chromosome No. 7—produces a mutant protein that interferes with cells' ability to manage chloride. This is what makes sweat from people with CF so salty. (Salt is sodium chloride, after all.) The chloride defect thickens secretions throughout the body, turning them dry and gluey. In the ducts of the pancreas, the flow of digestive enzymes becomes blocked, making a child less and less able to absorb food. This was why Annie had all but stopped growing. The effects on the lungs, however, are what make the disease lethal. Thickened mucus slowly fills the small airways and hardens, shrinking lung capacity. Over time, the disease leaves a child with the equivalent of just one functioning lung. Then half a lung. Then none at all.

The one overwhelming thought in the minds of Honor and Don Page was: We need to get to Children's. Cincinnati Children's Hospital is among the most respected pediatric hospitals in the country. It was where Albert Sabin invented the oral polio vaccine. The chapter on cystic fibrosis in the "Nelson Textbook of Pediatrics"—the bible of the specialty—was written by one of the hospital's pediatricians. The Pages called and were given an appointment for the next morning.

"We were there for hours, meeting with all the different members of the team," Honor recalled. "They took Annie's blood pressure, measured her oxygen saturation, did some other tests. Then they put us in a room, and the pediatrician sat down with us. He was very kind, but frank, too. He said, 'Do you understand it's a genetic disease? That it's nothing you did, nothing you can catch?' He told us the median survival for patients was thirty years. In Annie's lifetime, he said, we could see that go to forty. For him, he was sharing a great accomplishment in CF care. And the news was better than our worst fears. But only forty! That's not what we wanted to hear."

The team members reviewed the treatments. The Pages were told that they would have to give Annie pancreatic-enzyme pills with the first bite of every meal. They would have to give her supplemental vitamins. They also had to add calories wherever they could—putting tablespoons of butter on everything, giving her ice cream whenever she wanted, and then putting chocolate sauce on it.

A respiratory therapist explained that they would need to do manual chest therapy at least twice a day, half-hour sessions in which they would strike—"percuss"—their daughter's torso with a cupped hand at each of fourteen specific locations on the front, back, and sides in order to loosen the thick secretions and help her to cough them up. They were given prescriptions for inhaled medicines. The doctor told them that Annie would need to come back once every three months for extended checkups. And then they went home to start their new life. They had been told almost everything they needed to know in order to give Annie



Doctors like to think they're doing their job as well as it can be done. But when you measure their results the spread is wide.

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

her best chance to live as long as possible.

The one thing that the clinicians failed to tell them, however, was that Cincinnati Children's was not, as the Pages supposed, among the country's best centers for children with cystic fibrosis. According to data from that year, it was, at best, an average program. This was no small matter. In 1997, patients at an average center were living to be just over thirty years old; patients at the top center typically lived to be forty-six. By some measures, Cincinnati was well below average. The best predictor of a CF patient's life expectancy is his or her lung function. At Cincinnati, lung function for patients under the age of twelve—children like Annie—was in the bottom twenty-five per cent of the country's CF patients. And the doctors there knew it.

It used to be assumed that differences among hospitals or doctors in a particular specialty were generally insignificant. If you plotted a graph showing the results of all the centers treating cystic fibrosis—or any other disease, for that matter—people expected that the curve would look something like a shark fin, with most places clustered around the very best outcomes. But the evidence has begun to indicate otherwise. What you tend to find is a bell curve: a handful of teams with disturbingly poor outcomes for their patients, a handful with remarkably good results, and a great undistinguished middle.

In ordinary hernia operations, the chances of recurrence are one in ten for surgeons at the unhappy end of the spectrum, one in twenty for those in the middle majority, and under one in five hundred for a handful. A Scottish study of patients with treatable colon cancer found that the ten-year survival rate ranged from a high of sixty-three

"I preferred the Old Testament God."

per cent to a low of twenty per cent, depending on the surgeon. For heart-bypass patients, even at hospitals with a good volume of experience, risk-adjusted death rates in New York vary from five per cent to under one per cent—and only a very few hospitals are down near the one-per-cent mortality rate.

It is distressing for doctors to have to acknowledge the bell curve. It belies the promise that we make to patients who become seriously ill: that they can count on the medical system to give them their very best chance at life. It also contradicts the belief nearly all of us have that we are doing our job as well as it can be done. But evidence of the bell curve is starting to trickle out, to doctors and patients alike, and we are only beginning to find out what happens when it does.

In medicine, we are used to confronting failure; all doctors have unforeseen deaths and complications. What we're not used to is comparing our records of success and failure with those of our peers. I am a surgeon in a department that is, our members like to believe, one of the best in the country. But the truth is that we have had no reliable evidence about whether we're as good as we think we are. Baseball teams have win-loss records. Businesses have quarterly earnings reports. What about doctors?

There is a company on the Web called HealthGrades, which for $7.95 will give you a report card on any physician you choose. Recently, I requested the company's report cards on me and several of my colleagues. They don't tell you that much. You will learn, for instance, that I am in fact certified in my specialty, have no criminal convictions, have not been fired from any hospital, have not had my license suspended or revoked, and have not been disciplined. This is no doubt useful to know. But it sets the bar a tad low, doesn't it?

In recent years, there have been numerous efforts to measure how various hospitals and doctors perform. No one has found the task easy. One difficulty has been figuring out what to measure. For six years, from 1986 to 1992, the federal government released an annual report that came to be known as the Death List, which ranked all the hospitals in the country by their death rate for elderly and disabled patients on Medicare. The spread was alarmingly wide, and the Death List made headlines the first year it came out. But the rankings proved to be almost useless. Death among the elderly or disabled mostly has to do with how old or sick they are to begin with, and the statisticians could never quite work out how to apportion blame between nature and doctors. Volatility in the numbers was one sign of the trouble. Hospitals' rankings varied widely from one year to the next based on a handful of random deaths. It was unclear what kind of changes would improve their performance (other than sending their sickest patients to other hospitals). Pretty soon the public simply ignored the rankings.

Even with younger patients, death rates are a poor metric for how doctors do. After all, very few young patients die, and when they do it's rarely a surprise; most already have metastatic cancer or horrendous injuries or the like. What one really wants to know is how we perform in typical circumstances. After I've done an appendectomy, how long does it take for my patients to fully recover? After I've taken out a thyroid cancer, how often do my patients have serious avoidable complications? How do my results compare with those of other surgeons?

Getting this kind of data can be difficult. Medicine still relies heavily on paper records, so to collect information you have to send people to either scour the charts or track the patients themselves, both of which are expensive and laborious propositions. Recent privacy regulations have made the task still harder. Yet it is being done. The country's veterans' hospitals have all now brought in staff who do nothing but record and compare surgeons' complication rates and death rates. Fourteen teaching hospitals, including my own, have recently joined together to do the same. California, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania have been collecting and reporting data on every cardiac surgeon in their states for several years.

One small field in medicine has been far ahead of most others in measuring the performance of its practitioners: cystic-fibrosis care. For forty years, the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation has gathered detailed data from the country's cystic-fibrosis treatment centers. It did not begin doing so because it was more enlightened than everyone else. It did so because, in the nineteen-sixties, a pediatrician from Cleveland named LeRoy Matthews was driving people in the field crazy.

Matthews had started a cystic-fibrosis treatment program as a young pulmonary specialist at Babies and Children's Hospital, in Cleveland, in 1957, and within a few years was claiming to have an annual mortality rate that was less than two per cent. To anyone treating CF at the time, it was a preposterous assertion. National mortality rates for the disease were estimated to be higher than twenty per cent a year, and the average patient died by the age of three. Yet here was Matthews saying that he and his colleagues could stop the disease from doing serious harm for years. "How long [our patients] will live remains to be seen, but I expect most of them to come to my funeral," he told one conference of physicians.

In 1964, the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation gave a University of Minnesota pediatrician named Warren Warwick a budget of ten thousand dollars to collect reports on every patient treated at the thirty-one CF centers in the United States that year—data that would test Matthews's claim. Several months later, he had the results: the median estimated age at death for patients in Matthews's center was twenty-one years, seven times the age of patients treated elsewhere. He had not had a single death among patients younger than six in at least five years.

Unlike pediatricians elsewhere, Matthews viewed CF as a cumulative disease and provided aggressive treatment long before his patients became sick. He made his patients sleep each night in a plastic tent filled with a continuous, aerosolized water mist so dense you could barely see through it. This thinned the tenacious mucus that clogged their airways and enabled them to cough it up. Like British pediatricians, he also had family members clap on the children's chests daily to help loosen the mucus. After Warwick's report came out, Matthews's treatment quickly became the standard in this country. The American Thoracic Society endorsed his approach, and Warwick's data registry on treatment centers proved to be so useful that the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation has continued it ever since.

Looking at the data over time is both fascinating and disturbing. By 1966, mortality from CF nationally had dropped so much that the average life expectancy of CF patients had already reached ten years. By 1972, it was eighteen years—a rapid and remarkable transformation. At the same time, though, Matthews's center had got even better. The foundation has never identified individual centers in its data; to insure participation, it has guaranteed anonymity. But Matthews's center published its results. By the early nineteen-seventies, ninety-five per cent of patients who had gone there before severe lung disease set in were living past their eighteenth birthday. There was a bell curve, and the spread had narrowed a little. Yet every time the average moved up Matthews and a few others somehow managed to stay ahead of the pack. In 2003, life expectancy with CF had risen to thirty-three years nationally, but at the best center it was more than forty-seven. Experts have become as leery of life-expectancy calculations as they are of hospital death rates, but other measures tell the same story. For example, at the median center, lung function for patients with CF—the best predictor of survival—is about three-quarters of what it is for people without CF. At the top centers, the average lung function of patients is indistinguishable from that of children who do not have CF.

What makes the situation especially puzzling is that our system for CF care is far more sophisticated than that for most diseases. The hundred and seventeen CF centers across the country are all ultra-specialized, undergo a rigorous certification process, and have lots of experience in caring for people with CF. They all follow the same detailed guidelines for CF treatment. They all participate in research trials to figure out new and better treatments. You would think, therefore, that their results would be much the same. Yet the differences are enormous. Patients have not known this. So what happens when they find out?

In the winter of 2001, the Pages and twenty other families were invited by their doctors at Cincinnati Children's to a meeting about the CF program there. Annie was seven years old now, a lively, brown-haired second grader. She was still not growing enough, and a simple cold could be hellish for her, but her lung function had been stable. The families gathered in a large conference room at

"Could we talk about a drug deal gone terribly, terribly right for a change?"

the hospital. After a brief introduction, the doctors started flashing PowerPoint slides on a screen: here is how the top programs do on nutrition and respiratory performance, and here is how Cincinnati does. It was a kind of experiment in openness. The doctors were nervous. Some were opposed to having the meeting at all. But hospital leaders had insisted on going ahead. The reason was Don Berwick.

Berwick runs a small, nonprofit organization in Boston called the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. The institute provided multimillion-dollar grants to hospitals that were willing to try his ideas for improving medicine. Cincinnati's CF program won one of the grants. And among Berwick's key stipulations was that recipients had to open up their information to their patients—to "go naked," as one doctor put it.

Berwick, a former pediatrician, is an unusual figure in medicine. In 2002, the industry publication *Modern Healthcare* listed him as the third most powerful person in American health care. Unlike the others on the list, he is powerful not because of the position he holds. (The Secretary of Health and Human Services, Tommy Thompson, was No. 1, and the head of Medicare and Medicaid was No. 2.) He is powerful because of how he thinks.

In December, 1999, at a health-care conference, Berwick gave a forty-minute speech distilling his ideas about the failings of American health care. Five years on, people are still talking about the speech. The video of it circulated like samizdat. (That was how I saw it: on a grainy, overplayed tape, about a year later.) A booklet with the transcript was sent to thousands of doctors around the country. Berwick is middle-aged, soft-spoken, and unprepossessing, and he knows how to use his apparent ordinariness to his advantage. He began his speech with a gripping story about a 1949 Montana forest fire that engulfed a parachute brigade of firefighters. Panicking, they ran, trying to make it up a seventy-six-per-cent grade and over a crest to safety. But their commander, a man named Wag Dodge, saw that it wasn't going to work. So he stopped, took out some matches, and set the tall dry grass ahead of him on fire. The new blaze caught and rapidly spread up the slope. He stepped into the middle of the burned-out area it left behind, lay down, and called out to his crew to join him. He had invented what came to be called an "escape fire," and it later became a standard part of Forest Service fire training. His men, however, either thought he was crazy or never heard his calls, and they ran past him. All but two were caught by the inferno and perished. Inside his escape fire, Dodge survived virtually unharmed.

"If we're to make a life together, you have to accept that I'm a volunteer fireman and have to be ready to picnic at a moment's notice."

As Berwick explained, the organization had unravelled. The men had lost their ability to think coherently, to act together, to recognize that a lifesaving idea might be possible. This is what happens to all flawed organizations in a disaster, and, he argued, that's what is happening in modern health care. To fix medicine, Berwick maintained, we need to do two things: measure ourselves and be more open about what we are doing. This meant routinely comparing the performance of doctors and hospitals, looking at everything from complication rates to how often a drug ordered for a patient is delivered correctly and on time. And, he insisted, hospitals should give patients total access to the information. " 'No secrets' is the new rule in my escape fire," he said. He argued that openness would drive improvement, if simply through embarrassment. It would make it clear that the well-being and convenience of patients, not doctors, were paramount. It would also serve a fundamental moral good, because people should be able to learn about anything that affects their lives.

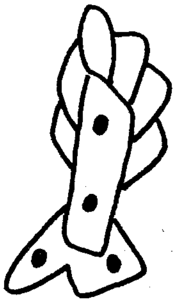
Berwick's institute was given serious money from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to offer those who used his ideas. And so the doctors, nurses, and social workers of Cincinnati Children's stood uncertainly before a crowd of patients' families in that hospital conference room, told them how poorly the program's results ranked, and announced a plan for doing better. Surprisingly, not a single family chose to leave the program.

"We thought about it after that meeting," Ralph Blackwelder told me. He and his wife, Tracey, have eight children, four of whom have CF. "We thought maybe we should move. We could sell my business here and start a business somewhere else. We were thinking, Why would I want my kids to be seen here, with inferior care? I want the very best people to be helping my children." But he and Tracey were impressed that the team had told them the truth. No one at Cincinnati Children's had made any excuses, and everyone appeared desperate to do better. The Blackwelders had known these people for years. The program's nutritionist, Terri Schindler, had a child of her own in the program. Their pulmonary specialist, Barbara Chini, had been smart, attentive, loving—taking their late-night phone calls, seeing the children through terrible crises, instituting new therapies as they became available. The program director, Jim Acton, made a personal promise that there would soon be no better treatment center in the world.

Honor Page was alarmed when she saw the numbers. Like the Blackwelders, the Pages had a close relationship with the team at Children's, but the news tested their loyalty. Acton announced the formation of several committees that would work to improve the program's results. Each committee, he said, had to have at least one parent on it. This is unusual; hospitals seldom allow patients and families on internal-review committees. So, rather than walk away, Honor decided to sign up for the committee that would reëxamine the science behind patients' care.

Her committee was puzzled that the center's results were not better. Not only had the center followed national guidelines for CF; two of its physicians had helped write them. They wanted to visit the top centers, but no one knew which those were. Although the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation's annual reports displayed the individual results for each of the country's hundred and seventeen centers, no names were attached. Doctors put in a call and sent e-mails to the foundation, asking for the names of the top five, but to no avail.

Several months later, in early 2002, Don Berwick visited the Cincinnati program. He was impressed by its seriousness, and by the intense involvement of the families, but he was incredulous when he learned that the committee couldn't get the names of the top programs from the foundation. He called the foundation's executive vice-president for medical affairs, Preston Campbell. "I was probably a bit self-righteous," Berwick says. "I said, 'How could you do this?' And he said, 'You don't understand our world.' " This was the first Campbell had heard about the requests, and he reacted with instinctive caution. The centers, he tried to explain, give their data voluntarily. The reason they have done so for forty years is that they have trusted that it would be kept confidential. Once the centers lost that faith, they might no longer report solid, honest information tracking how different treatments are working, how many patients there are, and how well they do.



Campbell is a deliberate and thoughtful man, a pediatric pulmonologist who has devoted his career to cystic-fibrosis patients. The discussion with Berwick had left him uneasy. The Cystic Fibrosis Foundation had always been dedicated to the value of research; by investing in bench science, it had helped decode the gene for cystic fibrosis, produce two new drugs approved for patients, and generate more than a dozen other drugs that are currently being tested. Its investments in tracking patient care had produced scores of valuable studies. But what do you do when the research shows that patients are getting care of widely different quality?

A couple of weeks after Berwick's phone call, Campbell released the names of the top five centers to Cincinnati. The episode convinced Campbell and others in the foundation that they needed to join the drive toward greater transparency, rather than just react. The foundation announced a goal of making the outcomes of every center publicly available. But it has yet to come close to doing so. It's a measure of the discomfort with this issue in the cystic-fibrosis world that Campbell asked me not to print the names of the top five. "We're not ready," he says. "It'd be throwing grease on the slope." So far, only a few of the nation's CF treatment centers are committed to going public.

Still, after travelling to one of the top five centers for a look, I found I could not avoid naming the center I saw—no obscuring physicians' identities or glossing over details. There was simply no way to explain what a great center did without the particulars. The people from Cincinnati found this, too. Within months of learning which the top five centers were, they'd spoken to each and then visited what they considered to be the very best one, the Minnesota Cystic Fibrosis Center, at Fairview-University Children's Hospital, in Minneapolis. I went first to Cincinnati, and then to Minneapolis for comparison.

What I saw in Cincinnati both impressed me and, given its ranking, surprised me. The CF staff was skilled, energetic, and dedicated. They had just completed a flu-vaccination campaign that had reached more than ninety per cent of their patients. Patients were being sent questionnaires before their clinic visits so that the team would be better prepared for the questions they would have and the services (such as X-rays, tests, and specialist consultations) they would need. Before patients went home, the doctors gave them a written summary of their visit and a complete copy of their record, something that I had never thought to do in my own practice.

I joined Cori Daines, one of the seven CF-care specialists, in her clinic one morning. Among the patients we saw was Alyssa. She was fifteen years old, freckled, skinny, with nails painted loud red, straight sandy-blond hair tied in a ponytail, a soda in one hand, legs crossed, foot bouncing constantly. Every few minutes, she gave a short, throaty cough. Her parents sat to one side. All the questions were directed to her. How had she been doing? How was school going? Any breathing difficulties? Trouble keeping up with her calories? Her answers were monosyllabic at first. But Daines had known Alyssa for years, and slowly she opened up. Things had mostly been going all right, she said. She had been sticking with her treatment regimen—twice-a-day manual chest therapy by one of her parents, inhaled medications using a nebulizer immediately afterward, and vitamins. Her lung function had been measured that morning, and it was sixty-seven per cent of normal—slightly down from her usual eighty per cent. Her cough had got a little worse the day before, and this was thought to be the reason for the dip. Daines was concerned about stomach pains that Alyssa had been having for several months. The pains came on unpredictably, Alyssa said—before meals, after meals, in the middle of the night. They were sharp, and persisted for up to a couple of hours. Examinations, tests,

"We could argue forever about whether or not that was justified."

• •

and X-rays had found no abnormalities, but she'd stayed home from school for the past five weeks. Her parents, exasperated because she seemed fine most of the time, wondered if the pain could be just in her head. Daines wasn't sure. She asked a staff nurse to check in with Alyssa at home, arranged for a consultation with a gastroenterologist and with a pain specialist, and scheduled an earlier return visit than the usual three months.

This was, it seemed to me, real medicine: untidy, human, but practiced carefully and conscientiously—as well as anyone could ask for. Then I went to Minneapolis.

The director of Fairview-University Children's Hospital's cystic-fibrosis center for almost forty years has been none other than Warren Warwick, the pediatrician who had conducted the study of LeRoy Matthews's suspiciously high success rate. Ever since then, Warwick has made a study of what it takes to do better than everyone else. The secret, he insists, is simple, and he learned it from Matthews: you do whatever you can to keep your patients' lungs as open as possible. Patients with CF at Fairview got the same things that patients everywhere did—some nebulized treatments to loosen secretions and unclog passageways (a kind of mist tent in a mouth pipe), antibiotics, and a good thumping on their chests every day. Yet, somehow, everything he did was different.

In the clinic one afternoon, I joined him as he saw a seventeen-year-old high-school senior named Janelle, who had been diagnosed with CF at the age of six and had been under his care ever since. She had come for her routine three-month checkup. She wore dyed-black hair to her shoulder blades, black Avril Lavigne eyeliner, four earrings in each ear, two more in an eyebrow, and a stud in her tongue. Warwick is seventy-six years old, tall, stooped, and frumpy-looking, with a well-worn tweed jacket, liver spots dotting his skin, wispy gray hair—by all appearances, a doddering, mid-century academic. He stood in front of Janelle for a moment, hands on his hips, looking her over, and then he said, "So, Janelle, what have you been doing to make us the best CF program in the country?"

"It's not easy, you know," she said.

They bantered. She was doing fine. School was going well. Warwick pulled out her latest lung-function measurements. There'd been a slight dip, as there was with Alyssa. Three months earlier, Janelle had been at a hundred and nine per cent (she was actually doing better than normal); now she was at around ninety per cent. Ninety per cent was still pretty good, and some ups and downs in the numbers are to be expected. But this was not the way Warwick saw the results.

He knitted his eyebrows. "Why did they go down?" he asked.

Janelle shrugged.

Any cough lately? No. Colds? No. Fevers? No. Was she sure she'd been taking her treatments regularly? Yes, of course. Every day? Yes. Did she ever miss treatments? Sure. Everyone does once in a while. How often is once in a while?

Then, slowly, Warwick got a different story out of her: in the past few months, it turned out, she'd barely been taking her treatments at all.

He pressed on. "Why aren't you taking your treatments?" He appeared neither surprised nor angry. He seemed genuinely curious, as if he'd never run across this interesting situation before.

"I don't know."

He kept pushing. "What keeps you from doing your treatments?"

"I don't know."

"Up here"—he pointed at his own head—"what's going on?"

"*I don't know,*" she said.

He paused for a moment. And then he began speaking to me, taking a new tack. "The thing about patients with CF is that they're good scientists," he said. "They always experiment. We have to help them interpret what they experience as they experiment. So they stop doing their treatments. And what happens? *They don't get sick.* Therefore, they conclude, Dr. Warwick is nuts."

"Let's look at the numbers," he said to me, ignoring Janelle. He went to a little blackboard he had on the wall. It appeared to be well used. "A person's daily risk of getting a bad lung illness with CF is 0.5 per cent." He wrote the number down. Janelle rolled her eyes. She began tapping her foot. "The daily risk of getting a bad lung illness with CF *plus treatment* is 0.05 per cent," he went on, and he wrote that number down. "So when you experiment you're looking at the difference between a 99.95-per-cent chance of staying well and a 99.5-per-cent chance of staying well. Seems hardly any difference, right? On any given day, you have basically a one-hundred-per-cent chance of being well. But"—he paused and took a step toward me—"it is a *big* difference." He chalked out the calculations. "Sum it up over a year, and it is the difference between an eighty-three-per-cent chance of making it through 2004 without getting sick and only a sixteen-per-cent chance."

He turned to Janelle. "How do you stay well all your life? How do you become a geriatric patient?" he asked her. Her foot finally stopped tapping. "I can't promise you anything. I can only tell you the odds."

In this short speech was the core of Warwick's world view. He believed that excellence came from seeing, on a daily basis, the difference between being 99.5-per-cent successful and being 99.95-per-cent successful. Many activities are like that, of course: catching fly balls, manufacturing microchips, delivering overnight packages. Medicine's only distinction is that lives are lost in those slim margins.

And so he went to work on finding that margin for Janelle. Eventually, he figured out that she had a new boyfriend. She had a new job, too, and was working nights. The boyfriend had his own apartment, and she was either there or at a friend's house most of the time, so she rarely made it home to take her treatments. At school, new rules required her to go to the school nurse for each dose of medicine during the day. So she skipped going. "It's such a pain," she said. He learned that there were some medicines she took and some she didn't. One she took because it was the only thing that she felt actually made a difference. She took her vitamins, too. ("Why your vitamins?" "Because they're cool.") The rest she ignored.

Warwick proposed a deal. Janelle would go home for a breathing treatment every day after school, and get her best friend to hold her to it. She'd also keep key medications in her bag or her pocket at school and take them on her own. ("The nurse won't let me." "Don't tell her," he said, and deftly turned taking care of herself into an act of rebellion.) So far, Janelle was O.K. with this. But there was one other thing, he said: she'd have to come to the hospital for a few days of therapy to recover the lost ground. She stared at him.

"Today?"

"Yes, today."

"How about tomorrow?"

"We've failed, Janelle," he said. "It's important to acknowledge when we've failed."

With that, she began to cry.

Warwick's combination of focus, aggressiveness, and inventiveness is what makes him extraordinary. He thinks hard about his patients, he pushes them, and he does not hesitate to improvise. Twenty years ago, while he was listening to a church choir and mulling over how he might examine his patients better, he came up with a new stethoscope—a stereo-stethoscope, he calls it. It has two bells dangling from it, and, because of a built-in sound delay, transmits lung sounds in stereo. He had an engineer make it for him. Listening to Janelle with the instrument, he put one bell on the right side of her chest and the other on her left side, and insisted that he could systematically localize how individual lobes of her lungs sounded.

He invented a new cough. It wasn't enough that his patients actively cough up their sputum. He wanted a deeper, better cough, and later, in his office, Warwick made another patient practice his cough. The patient stretched his arms upward, yawned, pinched his nose, bent down as far as he could, let the pressure build up, and then, straightening, blasted everything out. ("Again!" Warwick encouraged him. "Harder!")

He produced his most far-reaching invention almost two decades ago—a mechanized, chest-thumping vest for patients to wear. The chief difficulty for people with CF is sticking with the laborious daily regimen of care, particularly the manual chest therapy. It requires another person's help. It requires conscientiousness, making sure to bang on each of the fourteen locations on a patient's chest. And it requires consistency, doing this twice a day, every day, year after year. Warwick had become fascinated by studies showing that inflating and deflating a blood-pressure cuff around a dog's chest could mobilize its lung secretions, and in

"What wine goes best with vodka?"

the mid-nineteen-eighties he created what is now known as the Vest. It looks like a black flak jacket with two vacuum hoses coming out of the sides. These are hooked up to a compressor that shoots quick blasts of air in and out of the vest at high frequencies. (I talked to a patient while he had one of these on. He vibrated like a car on a back road.) Studies eventually showed that Warwick's device was at least as effective as manual chest therapy, and was used far more consistently. Today, forty-five thousand patients with CF and other lung diseases use the technology.

Like most medical clinics, the Minnesota Cystic Fibrosis Center has several physicians and many more staff members. Warwick established a weekly meeting to review everyone's care for their patients, and he insists on a degree of uniformity that clinicians usually find intolerable. Some chafe. He can have, as one of the doctors put it, "somewhat of an absence of, um, collegial respect for different care plans." And although he stepped down as director of the center in 1999, to let a protégé, Carlos Milla, take over, he remains its guiding spirit. He and his colleagues aren't content if their patients' lung function is eighty per cent of normal, or even ninety per cent. They aim for a hundred per cent—or better. Almost ten per cent of the children at his center get supplemental feedings through a latex tube surgically inserted into their stomachs, simply because, by Warwick's standards, they were not gaining enough weight. There's no published research showing that you need to do this. But not a single child or teen-ager at the center has died in years. Its oldest patient is now sixty-four.

The buzzword for clinicians these days is "evidence-based practice"—good doctors are supposed to follow research findings rather than their own intuition or ad-hoc experimentation. Yet Warwick is almost contemptuous of established findings. National clinical guidelines for care are, he says, "a record of the past, and little more—they should have an expiration date." I accompanied him as he visited another of his patients, Scott Pieper. When Pieper came to Fairview, at the age of thirty-two, he had lost at least eighty per cent of his lung capacity. He was too weak and short of breath to take a walk, let alone work, and he wasn't expected to last a year. That was fourteen years ago.

"Some days, I think, This is it—I'm not going to make it," Pieper told me. "But other times I think, I'm going to make sixty, seventy, maybe more." For the past several months, Warwick had Pieper trying a new idea—wearing his vest not only for two daily thirty-minute sessions but also while napping for two hours in the middle of the day. Falling asleep in that shuddering thing took some getting used to. But Pieper was soon able to take up bowling, his first regular activity in years. He joined a two-night-a-week league. He couldn't go four games, and his score always dropped in the third game, but he'd worked his average up to 177. "Any ideas about what we could do so you could last for that extra game, Scott?" Warwick asked. Well, Pieper said, he'd noticed that in the cold—anything below fifty degrees—and when humidity was below fifty per cent, he did better. Warwick suggested doing an extra hour in the vest on warm or humid days and on every game day. Pieper said he'd try it.

"I've always been an outsider, but I never achieved the status of a pariah."

We are used to thinking that a doctor's ability depends mainly on science and skill. The lesson from Minneapolis is that these may be the easiest parts of care. Even doctors with great knowledge and technical skill can have mediocre results; more nebulous factors like aggressiveness and consistency and ingenuity can matter enormously. In Cincinnati and in Minneapolis, the doctors are equally capable and well versed in the data on CF. But if Annie Page—who has had no breathing problems or major setbacks—were in Minneapolis she would almost certainly have had a feeding tube in her stomach and Warwick's team hounding her to figure out ways to make her breathing even better than normal.

Don Berwick believes that the subtleties of medical decision-making can be identified and learned. The lessons are hidden. But if we open the book on physicians' results, the lessons will be exposed. And if we are genuinely curious about how the best achieve their results, he believes they will spread.

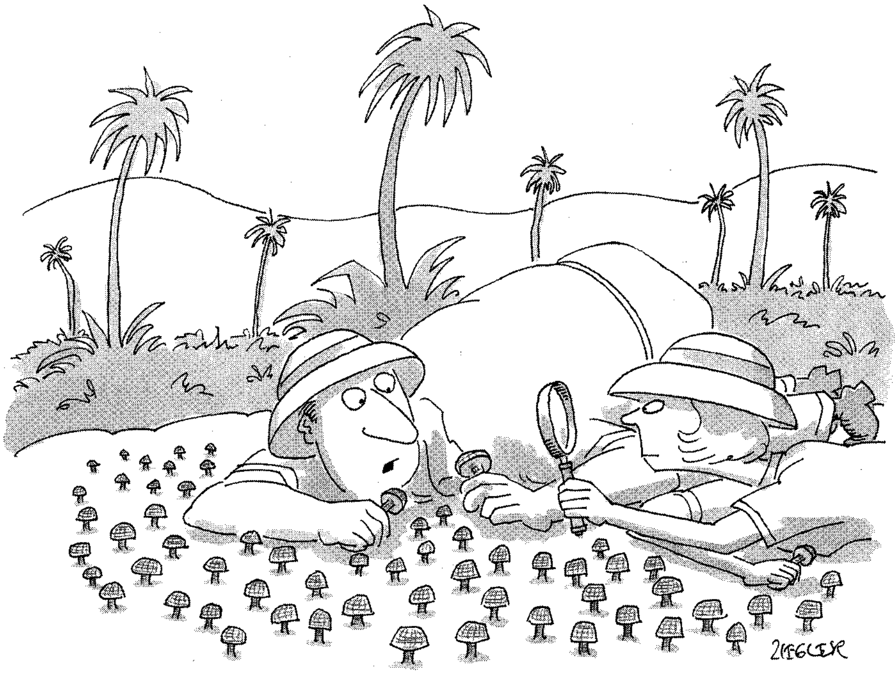
The Cincinnati CF team has already begun tracking the nutrition and lung function of individual patients the way Warwick does, and is getting more aggressive in improving the results in these areas, too. Yet you have to wonder whether it is possible to replicate people like Warwick, with their intense drive and constant experimenting. In the two years since the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation began bringing together centers willing to share their data, certain patterns have begun to emerge, according to Bruce Marshall, the head of quality improvement for the foundation. All the centers appear to have made significant progress. None, however, have progressed more than centers like Fairview.

"You look at the rates of improvement in different quartiles, and it's the centers in the top quartile that are improving fastest," Marshall says. "They are at risk of breaking away." What the best may have, above all, is a capacity to learn and adapt—and to do so faster than everyone else.

Once we acknowledge that, no matter how much we improve our average, the bell curve isn't going away, we're left with all sorts of questions. Will being in the bottom half be used against doctors in lawsuits? Will we be expected to tell our patients how we score? Will our patients leave us? Will those at the bottom be paid less than those at the top? The answer to all these questions is likely yes.

Recently, there has been a lot of discussion, for example, about "paying for quality." (No one ever says "docking for mediocrity," but it amounts to the same thing.) Congress has discussed the idea in hearings. Insurers like Aetna and the Blue Cross–Blue Shield companies are introducing it across the country. Already, Medicare has decided not to pay surgeons for intestinal transplantation operations unless they achieve a predefined success rate. Not surprisingly, this makes doctors anxious. I recently sat in on a presentation of the concept to an audience of doctors. By the end, some in the crowd were practically shouting with indignation: We're going to be paid according to our *grades*? Who is doing the grading? For God's sake, how?

We in medicine are not the only ones being graded nowadays. Firemen, C.E.O.s, and salesmen are. Even teachers are being graded, and, in some places, being paid accordingly. Yet we all feel uneasy about being judged by such grades. They never seem to measure the right things. They don't take into account circumstances beyond our control. They are misused; they are unfair. Still, the simple facts remain: there is a bell curve in all human activities, and the differences you measure usually matter.



"They're designer plaid, for God's sake. How poisonous can they be?"

I asked Honor Page what she would do if, after all her efforts and the efforts of the doctors and nurses at Cincinnati Children's Hospital to insure that "there was no place better in the world" to receive cystic-fibrosis care, their comparative performance still rated as resoundingly average.

"I can't believe that's possible," she told me. The staff have worked so hard, she said, that she could not imagine they would fail.

After I pressed her, though, she told me, "I don't think I'd settle for Cincinnati if it remains just average." Then she thought about it some more. Would she really move Annie away from people who had been so devoted all these years, just because of the numbers? Well, maybe. But, at the same time, she wanted me to understand that their effort counted for more than she was able to express.

I do not have to consider these matters for very long before I start thinking about where I would stand on a bell curve for the operations I do. I have chosen to specialize (in surgery for endocrine tumors), so I would hope that my statistics prove to be better than those of surgeons who only occasionally do the kind of surgery I do. But am I up in Warwickian territory? Do I have to answer this question?

The hardest question for anyone who takes responsibility for what he or she does is, What if I turn out to be average? If we took all the surgeons at my level of experience, compared our results, and found that I am one of the worst, the answer would be easy: I'd turn in my scalpel. But what if I were a C? Working as I do in a city that's mobbed with surgeons, how could I justify putting patients under the knife? I could tell myself, Someone's got to be average. If the bell curve is a fact, then so is the reality that most doctors are going to be average. There is no shame in being one of them, right?

Except, of course, there is. Somehow, what troubles people isn't so much being average as settling for it. Everyone knows that averageness is, for most of us, our fate. And in certain matters—looks, money, tennis—we would do well to accept this. But in your surgeon, your child's pediatrician, your police department, your local high school? When the stakes are our lives and the lives of our children, we expect averageness to be resisted. And so I push to make myself the best. If I'm not the best already, I believe wholeheartedly that I will be. And you expect that of me, too. Whatever the next round of numbers may say. ♦

FICTION

FOREIGNERS

BY ANDREW O'HAGAN

Aunt Jessie made a special effort to mispronounce our names, just to stress her hatred of my mother. She liked to sit for hours in the kitchen smoking those terrible Woodbines, chewing the air between puffs as if appraising the air's goodness to breathe. It was all part of some ceremony of impatience, at the end of which she would open her mouth to free a volume of smoke, followed by whatever unkind words had been brewing in her head all day. "They have no business naming you all after precious stones, or exotic flowers, or birds from foreign places with giant beaks. I don't mind telling you: it's a piece of nonsense. They must think the rest of us were born in a sack of potatoes. Sean's a good enough name for a person, or Bridget, or else Fergus, like your Uncle Fergus."

Even then, twenty years ago, Aunt Jessie loved to exaggerate. None of us is a Motmot, a Crocus, or a Yucca: my younger sister Topaz is Tops to everyone who knows her, and Lawrence is just Lawrence. Jessie has never spoken these names without disparagement: Topaz is Tonya to her and Lawrence is Larry, though she still thinks that's a bit on the flowery side. "Now, I'm asking you," she said. "What in the name of the child Jesus is wrong with being a Fergus?"

"People only laugh at a Fergus."

"Well, let them laugh until the air stops in their throats," said Aunt Jessie. "You will soon be ready for St. Michael's and you'll sail through your mathematics and all the exams that prove you're nothing ordinary, laughing at people's nice names. I advise you to keep your brains immaculate. You'll soon be the very boss of your teachers, Amanda."

"Amaryllis," I said.

"Exotic bird. Colored person. Whatever it is."

My aunt said this and took my hand. "Your lines on here are more Irish than Scottish," she said. "One of them goes on for miles. It is very bad. It shows the journey away from the Holy Cross."

"That might be quite interesting," I said.

The kitchen table was made from an old barn door and Aunt Jessie began knocking the wood. The television in the next room and the buses outside, the world indeed and its famous possibilities, were made silent for a while by the fury of her knocking. When the noise finally stopped, when Aunt Jessie's hand came to rest on the table, my lips were covered with a soft dusting of flour. A bowl of fresh eggs sat between us. They were Glaswegian eggs: more than usually small and white and not quite oval, they had shoogled in the bowl when the table was thumped. "You'll keep a civil tongue in your head," said my aunt. "Heathen that you are. Colored person. Whatever it is. I'm still strong enough to give you a good kick on the backside and watch your black eyes tumbling down the stairs."

I was a child then, and could oppose Aunt Jessie only with an army of private imaginings. That day, I thought of the Glasgow eggs cracking open and spilling out of the bowl to advance over the old barn door. I thought of one egg after the other travelling to meet her fingertips, then moving upward to coat the skin of her arms and touch her face. Nothing would stop the flow of her catechism—not the eggs' insides, anyhow, which might choose to spread over Aunt Jessie's entire body in a manner quite unnoticed by Herself in favor of the Nazarene. Perhaps I would look south and see the egg running down her American Tan tights onto her carpet slippers. She'd continue to describe eternities to be spent in the bad fires of Hell, her sticky fingers drumming the table. I'd see her lashes slicked to the skin around her eyes, and she'd look surprised in the cold kitchen light, no doubt beginning to wonder why I chose that day to teach her the vengefulness of eggs. This all came back to me recently, when I went round to Aunt Jessie's house to give her a hand getting rid of my uncle's things.

"You never know when you're going to drop dead," Aunt Jessie often says, and for years she has spoken about liver salts and miracle cures, as though being ill were a larger way of being alive, having knowledge about the dangers and making a little more room for yourself in a world of diminishing returns. Mother said Jessie must have thought she'd hit the jackpot when the doctors called her in to say my Uncle Fergus was terminal. "What unbelievable luck!" said my mother. "Just you watch her now. She'll never be back from Boots the Chemist. She'll be marching up and down the Main Street with a sad face. 'Oh, my heart is broken,' she'll say to anyone who'll listen." My mother was never an easy person, mind you, and rather married to her own aches and pains, but she had a point about her sister's secret pleasure at the prospect of distress. Jessie had always been like that. She loved pain and its daily demands. She loved Boots.

As it turned out, my mother, Bernadette, began to fail on a warm day at the end of last summer. She went into the Royal Infirmary, and we knew it was bad when they gave her a room with a television. It was a hopeless operation, and she never woke again. At the drinks thing after the funeral, a bad-mannered old worthy from Ireland noticed that Jessie and Fergus were absent. "Now," he said, "that's a queer thing, is it not? To stay away when they're putting your own flesh and blood into the ground?"

"It's not that queer," my brother said. "Aunt Jessie and my mother had no time for one another. That's that."

My mother was younger than Jessie by eighteen months, though she preferred to call it three years. They grew up together at the bottom of Ireland, and Jessie was forever the favorite, "the one with the great humor," their father said. He never liked his second daughter: if she put a mouse into his slippers he would call her cruel, but if Jessie played the same trick he would laugh into the evening and stroke her hair. Jessie moved to Scotland when she was still a young woman, and I suppose my mother never stopped wanting to have what Jessie had. She followed her sister to Scotland, but then quickly married my dad before Jessie could help her. "She wanted to be nearby," Jessie said once. "Which isn't the same as being close." My mother made her disapproval of Jessie part of her sense of herself.

Scotland itself meant nothing to my mother; she never believed in the country as Jessie did. So, through the years, as Jessie appeared to grow smaller and more Scottish, my mother, the child-bearing young pretender, became more and more foreign, somehow posher in her own estimation, even after my father vanished. Posher, perhaps, in place of being richer: my grandfather left everything he had to Jessie, the money from four Irish farms, and it paid on the

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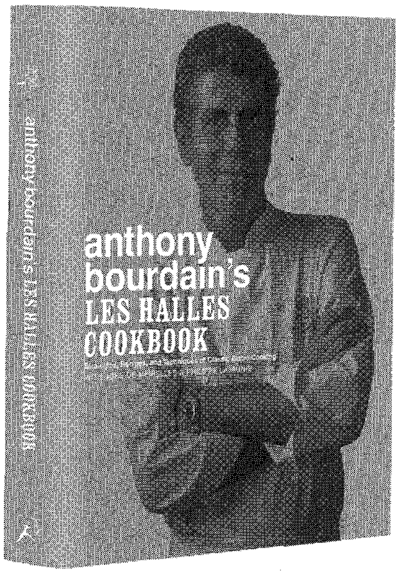

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nose for her life with Fergus. I suppose that's it: Jessie got the money; we got the names.

"You're a person and a half," Aunt Jessie said to me when I turned up at the house. "There used to be young women like you, ten a penny in County Cork," she said. "Nice white blouses. Curly hair. They didn't know the dangers, either." Jessie was still formidable with her plaid skirts and smokes. I glanced around the room and noticed, through the arch, that her kitchen table was no longer a barn door but a metallic gurney from Ikea.

"Will we go into Glasgow?" I said. "There's a new Chinese restaurant they were nice about in the *Evening Times*. I'll sort through Uncle Fergus's clothes when we get back."

She looked at me as if I were setting out to test her. "Right," she said, and after forty minutes she came back down the stairs wearing a gray scarf and summer sandals.

"It's too cold for those shoes," I said.

"My feet get itchy."

"Well, sprinkle some talcum powder on them and we'll find some good cotton socks."

"Is that what you lecture on at the university?" she asked.

"Common sense."

"Ha ha," she said. "Talcum powder and feet. That's your specialist subject for those gullible Americans."

"No, actually." I said. "It's Modern German Thought."

She stabbed the air between us to underscore her victory and then wiped her mouth. "I've got a good ointment for that," she said.

Jessie thought universities were meant for people who wanted to hide away from life, people who wanted to be special. For her it was part of my mother's one-upmanship. "A girl like you can make the world stand on its head," she said. "But there you are. You'd rather mark people's jotters and scratch all day on an old blackboard."

"It's what I've always wanted to do," I said.

"Nonsense. It's what Bernie wanted."

"It's the best thing my mother did for us, Jessie," I said.

"That's saying something," she said.

She got under my skin with that talk. I'd been an undergraduate at Glasgow University and then I did my doctorate there. "You've never budged from that Protestant department," Jessie said. "Now you're there stuck in Glasgow teaching every day while the world passes you by."

"Life is elsewhere," I said, just to annoy her.

"No. It's where you find it," said Jessie. "And nobody ever found anything with their head stuck in a book all day."

I always drove faster when Jessie was in the car. It was good to show her the occasional thing she couldn't control. In the restaurant, the leaves of a spider plant tickled her neck and she complained of too much ice in her vodka. She wouldn't have wine and she hated fizzy water. "Wine's not meant for the Scottish," she said. "It gives you acid. You have to go in and ask for Nexium for that if it gets bad. Or else Tagamet. That's the more common one."

"Just one glass," I said.

"Never you mind," she said. "It's the slippery slope for the Scots. They can't digest wine."

"But you're Irish," I said.

"That's right. And I'll never drink wine."

She sat for a while making faces at a tropical fish tank. You can always tell when Aunt Jessie is preparing herself for something big. "There's no need whatsoever for anybody to live like that," she said. "Underwater all the time. With blue stones and yellow stones. It's a piece of nonsense."

"It's a fish," I said.

"And who decides what colors they like?"

"It's just a nice thing to look at."

"Not for the likes of me. It's just a way of making people feel depressed about their own lives."

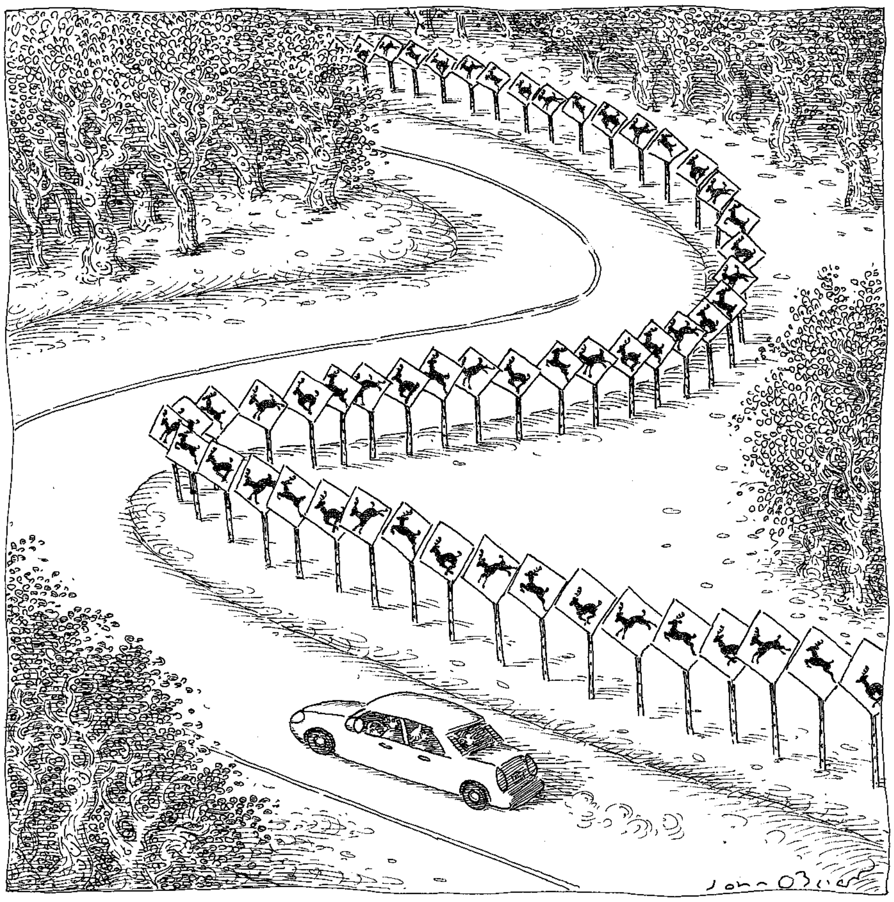
"Aunt Jessie, it's a fishtank!"

"Mark my words," she said. "It's cruel. Those fish were never meant to be here. They resent it. They don't like the damp weather and they absolutely hate the smell of food."

While she searched in her bag for a mint, I noticed the gold rings had disappeared from her fingers. She said she had given them to Our Lady of Good Counsel. "There's girls in the parish have babies and no husbands," she said. "Ten a penny, I'm telling you. Not a man between them."

"Modern times," I said.

"I'll give you modern," said Aunt Jessie.



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“They don't have the right shampoo. The babies' heads are jumping with lice.”

“Not all of them.”

“Yes, Amanda. All of them. All the babies in the parish whose mothers don't have men have lice. And there are no proper bottles to feed them with, either. Hardly a single bottle between all of them babies. And none of those cleaning machines—sterilizers.”

“That's bad news,” I said.

“I've never heard worse,” said Aunt Jessie. “Because you can get things to kill germs, if only you keep your eyes open.”

“Sterilizers.”

“That's right. And the girls of the parish have none, so we're selling things up at the church to raise the money.”

“That's a nice task.”

“No thanks to the men, wherever they are. You've got to make an enemy of germs!”

Aunt Jessie formed a dirty look on her face and cast it toward a Chinese waiter. “Tell that one to turn off the Calor Gas,” she said. “The fire. It's too hot and it's making my ankles swell up.”

“Tell him yourself,” I said.

“No, you tell him. He won't do it for me. They like nasty young people like you. They're always trying to marry girls like you, girls with a nice clean passport, just so's they can get to stay here for good and sponge off the social security.”

“That's rubbish, Jessie. They're more Glaswegian than you. They were born here.”

“Don't you believe it,” she said. “I wasn't born here, but I wasn't born yesterday, either. Those ones want your passport. They'll pretend to love you: next minute—they're off.”

“Rubbish.”

“Aye, well, Amanda. You just stick to your university books. Half the wee girls up at the school have kids to these ones.”

“Aunt Jessie!”

“I'm telling you. At least half. All the ones with no sterilizers. All those germs in the milk bottles. It all started off with these Asian ones and their fish and their liking for passports. You'd think there was enough babies in China.”

“Anyway. You gave your rings to the church.”

“That's right. Wedding band as

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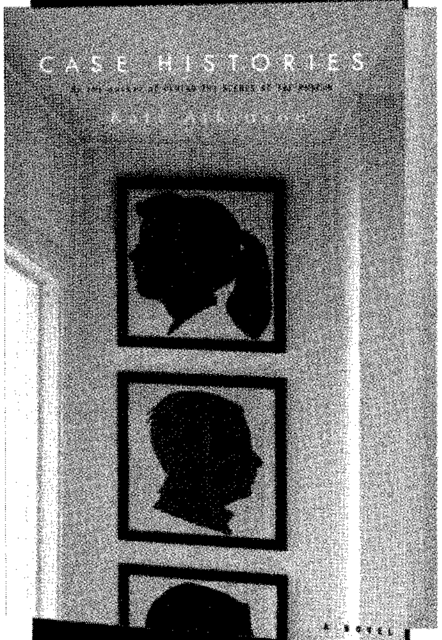

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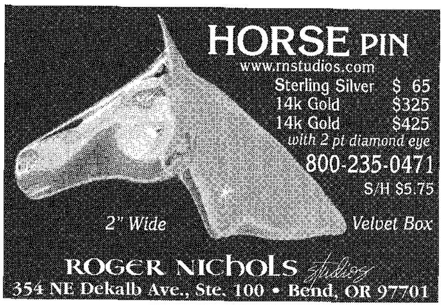

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well. Your Uncle Fergus had a good heart and he would've hated this business with the germy babies, just like I do. You've got to put a stop to ugliness."

My boyfriend from America was the point of this talk. She would never mention his name, never mention Miami, yet all the time she was mocking the Chinese I knew she was really saying how much she hated Ben. "People meet these men on holidays," she said. "They get drunk at those hotel discos and wake up with babies. That's what happens. Then the men come here, and after that they all run away." Eventually I put my keys down on the table and told her to shush.

"Stop it, Jessie. God hates this kind of talk."

"Don't bring Him into it."

"Well, stop," I said. "You're only offending the Lord. Do you want to be doing that? Because that's what you're doing."

"He's not bothered," she said.

"Don't you believe it," I said. "God hears everything. And He loves everybody. That is what the philosophers would say."

"Don't talk nonsense. They were all heathens."

"Just the smart ones. But, anyway, the logic of the thing . . ."

She wouldn't let me finish. She just made the Sign of the Cross, then looked me in the eye with her wise look, the look that says, "I'm about to tell you something you've needed to know for a long time."

"Those people you admire all died of venereal disease," she said.

It troubled her to think of Ben. There he was, this American, this man from somewhere she'd never visited. She examined the chopsticks, then placed them on either side of her mat, like a knife and fork, and, watching her tiny movements, I wondered what she thought. Was it just that the world was full of Bens, people not good enough for her niece? Or was it me that wasn't good enough for this mysterious Ben? My brother Lawrence told me that Jessie had rung him up a few nights earlier. "He's actually a really nice guy," Lawrence had told her. "He's smart. Quite funny. He's over from America to study at the university. He knows everything about Stalingrad."

"I expect he does," Jessie had said.

"Be pleased for her," said Lawrence.

"And has he a ring for her?"

"Get a grip," he said. "They're only going out together."

"But she loves him, Larry," said Jessie, snapping for more, I'll bet. "She loves him to death. I can tell by the way she's doing her hair."

Lawrence and I laughed for ages at that.

"Then what?" I asked.

"You know what she's like," said Lawrence.

"Come on, then," I said.

"Well," said Lawrence. He paused. "She asked if Ben was of the black persuasion."

"She actually used those words?"

"Aye."

"And what did you say?"

"I said he was African-American. I said that was how we talked nowadays. I said he was a smart African-American guy from Florida."

"Oh, Lawrence."

"I know," he said. "Isn't that a cracker? She just huffed and puffed. You know what she's like."

I looked over the pot of soy sauce at Aunt Jessie. She was staring past me at the fishtank, and she wiped a corner of her mouth very precisely, like Mother.

Aunt Jessie liked to pretend she disliked all food except the stuff she prepared herself—tongue sandwiches, mashed potato—but it wasn't true. She loved restaurant food, and was known to chomp her way through the hors d'oeuvres with the kind of gusto that can come only from experience. Eating prawn toast and several spring rolls, she began to reminisce about Uncle Fergus, saying how different he was from other men. How decent he was. How clean. "What happened to *his* passport?" I said. But Aunt Jessie didn't mind that sort of remark; she was familiar enough with her own bad character to find other people's quite convivial.

"It's under the carriage clock," she said.

"Fergus Campbell," I said. "You must sometimes wish you'd married somebody with a livelier name in his passport."

"Not me," she said. "You're all halfway up a gum tree with those horrible names. That's your daft mother, putting it on. I'm Jessie Campbell and I'll be Jessie Campbell to my dying day."

The restaurant was quiet, fish swimming, waiters smiling, when a tiny crunch sounded inside Jessie's mouth. It was halfway between a crunch and a crack, perhaps more of a snap. Her eyes filled with tears as she began to pull out a long barbecued rib. My evil heart was pleased for a second, and then a broken tooth dropped onto the tablecloth, followed instantly by a pendulous exclamation mark of drool. I managed to get her back to the house in something like one piece; she was still crying and cursing foreigners under the porch light.

My aunt is not exactly a collector, but, over the years, she had made some attempt at collecting the Dolls of the World, and she said there was no doubt she owned the best ones. The collection started when she and Uncle Fergus got married, with a clog dancer from Holland which still stood in a paper box covered in tulips, forty-five years after the honeymoon. The dolls were kept in a large, custom-built display cabinet fixed to the wall going up the stairs, and all the eyes seemed to follow you to the landing, each doll standing in silent testament to the trips Jessie and Fergus had made together. A Spanish flamenco dancer had sequins glued to her shoes and she brandished a black lace fan.

"What's this?" I said, stopping behind Aunt Jessie on the stairs to point through the glass cabinet.

"South African lady," she said.

"That's a bit odd."

"Nineteen seventy-six," she said. "Too hot. Rubbishy hotel, so far as I can remember. Not a very big pool. And that's the thing: your Uncle Fergus liked a good swim. He only went abroad for the swimming." For a second, the doll's periwinkle eyes stared right through me and somehow told me there was nothing more to say. Aunt Jessie climbed the last of the stairs, still complaining about her tooth. "Now I've hardly anything to chew with," she said. "I used to have a whole mouth. Nothing was any problem. Steaks, Highland Toffee, you name it."

Aunt Jessie first saw Scotland on a visit to Culzean Castle with the typing pool from Farl & Leckie, a shirtmaking firm in Kinsale. She was quite high up in the company, head of sales, in fact, but she liked to take outings with the office girls because the girls had more life about them. Fergus didn't have a great job; he worked the gates at Culzean—I mean he took the tickets. Naturally, Aunt Jessie thought that was a very glamorous thing to do with your life, to work in a castle filled with pistols and swords, antique weapons once put to good use, she imagined, in holding back the English. She told me the letters Fergus Campbell sent to her after that trip to Scotland were the sweetest things ever written by an idiot, and on receiving the third one she began making plans to leave County Cork, saying there were always jobs in the world for girls with brains and a clean driver's license. "Scotland is just like Ireland," she said. "Full of songs nobody knows the words to. And piled up with dirty bottles."

I've always liked sounding out the details of Jessie's story. "And you wanted for nothing once you were here," I said, pulling down her bedroom blind to hide the rain and the memory of the Chinese. "You wanted for nothing and lived in the first bungalow built in Kilmarnock."

"You're just checking for Alzheimer's," she said. "It wasn't a bloody bungalow, it was a cottage. A proper cottage, with stairs. And it had been standing there since Robert Burns."

There were times like this, when my attempt to show an interest in the family's past seemed challenging to Jessie, as if the interest could smack only of my mother's contentions. "That's just our Bernadette talking," she would say, as if to damn my curiosities and make them hostile. In our family, the past was more changeable than the weather, more ominous than dark clouds.

"Why did my mother come to Scotland?" I asked. I always had to think twice before mentioning my mother. It was as if I were invoking an ancient curse. I suppose I was afraid of what might follow—the usual litany of who did what to whom. But I was ashamed of myself for being so weak in the face of Jessie's weakness.

Aunt Jessie looked up at the ceiling as if scanning a map of the world. "Because she was greedy for other people's lives," she said.

"That's unfair, Aunt Jessie."

"Well, Amanda—if we're using names! Don't ask questions if you already have a better answer. You're asking me, I'm telling you. Bernie should never have left Ireland. She had no good reason to leave. She only wanted to show me I was nothing much."

"She's not here anymore, Jessie. Have

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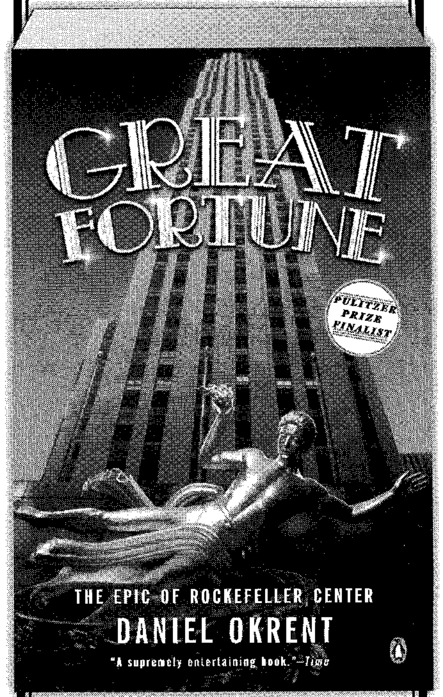
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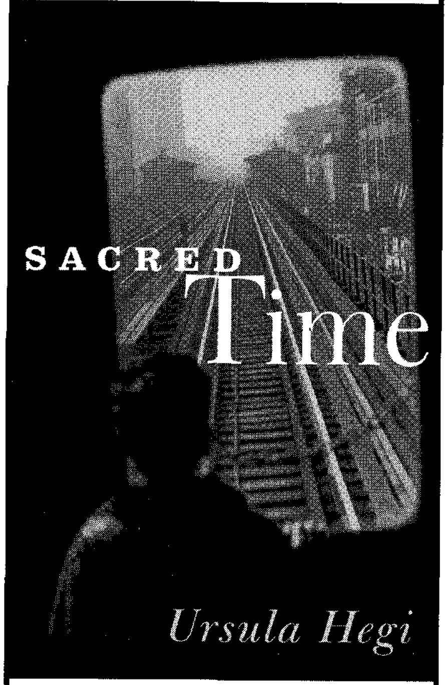

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you no softness about you?" When I said this, Jessie looked at the carpet and said nothing for a moment.

"She wasn't well," she said, eventually. "I know that. She had an operation and it's terrible to have an operation. They opened and closed her."

"She died, Aunt Jessie."

"I know that," she said. "It's a terrible business. But your mother would've died in Ireland just the same."

"Would you stop, Jessie," I said. "She only wanted a better life."

"Oh, yes," said Jessie, quietly. "We all wanted that."

The moment drifted off, and Jessie went carefully round the bed, adjusting the valance. She moaned to herself, poking a finger into her sore mouth, and when I went down to the bathroom she yelled, "You won't find any Tampax in there!" I laughed at that, and laughed again when I saw the bathroom was just as I remembered: not a room containing a medical cabinet but a medical room, a health center, a place where the world's most mysterious ailments might swiftly be remedied. There were pills for malaria and angina, though no one in the house had ever had either, creams for burns, ointments for bruises, blue and gray puffers for whooping cough and asthma. The window was blocked off with cartons of Tums, and there were bottles of disinfectant dirty enough to require scrubbing with their own contents. I found the oil of cloves on the corner of the tub; the bottle was undusty, the cap loose.

"Don't hurt me!" she said as I dabbed her gums. "Some people just like to hurt other people. That's what they're like. Forever rubbing salt."

"This is good stuff," I said. "You'll be ready for more lunch in ten minutes."

Like an old woman in a Flemish painting, Jessie's face caught the light coming through the blind. Her eyes were as blue as those on the Dolls of the World, and she smiled in a manner quite obscure before turning to the mirrored door. "It wouldn't matter to me if I never ate a meal again," she said.

I've always been rubbish with people feeling sorry for themselves, so I said nothing at first, then I met her eyes in the mirror and couldn't cope with that, either.

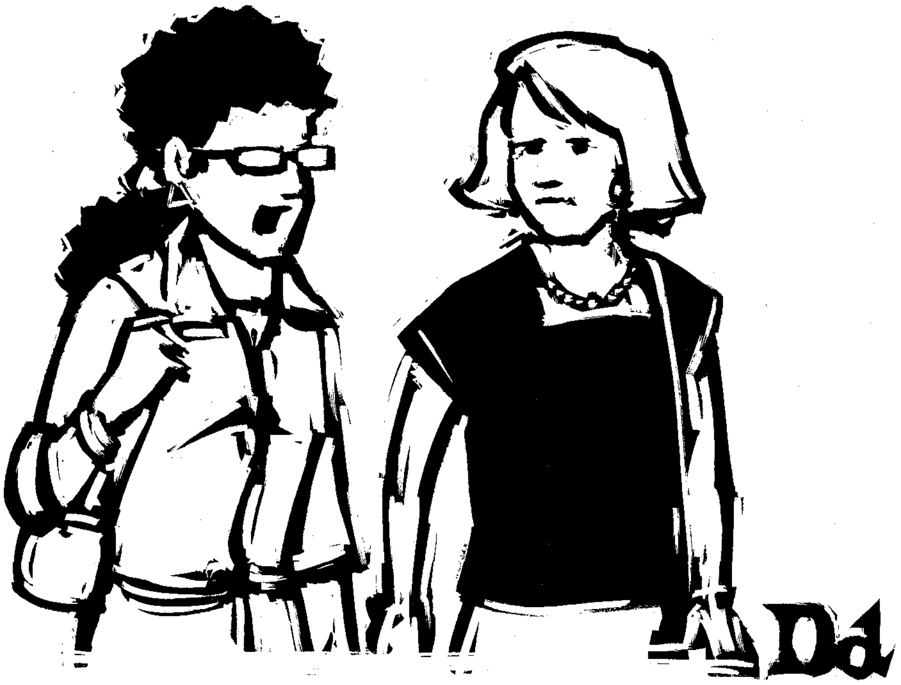
"Did you put the sink in here?" I asked.

"Aye. That was me. I paid the man from Him'll Fix It to make a sink for your Uncle Fergus, in case he wanted to wash his hands in the middle of the night. Save him going down the steps."

"That was nice," I said.

"He was such a clean-living man," said Aunt Jessie.

Next to the bed, a rosewood chest gave support to a stuffed camel, a family mascot with lashes as long as an Egyptian summer. Its eyes were amber buttons, seeing



"So far, it seems to be a perfect fit. I'm the yin, and Roger is the money."

nothing, recording nothing, but the camel had started life in some far-flung bazaar, during our Polaroid days, when each of us loved the notion of travel, when together we planned the great lives we might live, for weeks at a time, in the world called Abroad, waving from trains, making calls from hotels, learning bits of languages, and going our own way. Aunt Jessie was never one for the Spanish Steps or the lobbies of old museums, but she loved those days of seawater and a bottle of tanning oil stuck in the sand. It was never a break from life but life itself. Aunt Jessie had done all that. But the image she now stared at every day was their one remaining landscape, "A Field Outside Dalry, 1913," by George Houston, a local painter who had loved Corot. The painting hung opposite the bed, and it seemed in itself to describe the difference between beauty experienced and beauty admired. It was basically a painting of a Scottish puddle, but it meant the world to Aunt Jessie.

Fergus had begun buying paintings from Christie's when Jessie first came into her money, and, more recently, as the money ran out, he had sold them back. Jessie considered it a fair enough development. Fergus had been good at having money and was just as good at having none. "We made sensible use of the pictures," she said. "Now it's somebody else's turn."

"But that one's different?"

"Aye," she said. "That one's part of the furniture."

Jessie seemed tired, but talking about the Houston gave me the urge to vex her. "You don't regret the money?" I said.

"Not a bit," she said. "Your grandfather died too young, standing all day in fields, wet up to the knees. The money meant your Uncle Fergus could work at stuff that interested him. He liked history, that kind of thing. Brodick Castle. The Battle of Largs."

"Tourist things," I said.

"Don't be so German," she said. "People can be interested in things without sitting in a university all day."

The silence that followed was filled with bad feeling, but it didn't last, the silence. It never lasted with Aunt Jessie. "Amanda. Amaryllis. Colored person. Would you itch my poor feet?" she said.

"Lie down."

"I'm not going to sleep," she said. "Once you start that, once you start sleeping at three o'clock in the afternoon, that's you dead. I've seen it a hundred times. You start napping and you're dead in no time."

I rubbed her feet, the tops of her socks. "I'm quite the nurse today," I said.

"*Die Frau Ärztin!*"

"I'm not German," I said.

"No," she said, "but you love the Jerries. You're always reading those books. The brainboxes. Well, I'll tell you something for nothing: they weren't brainy enough to hold us back at Normandy."

"Who's *us*?" I said. "You and the English?"

"Don't start," she said. "The likes of you probably wishes the Jerries had won the war. Then you could speak German to one another all day and drive about in tanks."

"Germany is not just about Nazis," I said. "There's more to Germany than that, thousands of years more."

"I know," she said. "You don't have to tell me. I've seen 'The Sound of Music.'"

Jessie kept some loose cigarettes in an empty Kleenex box. I saw her take one out and reach under the bed for an ashtray. "Chuck me a light over," she said. There was a glass vase on the dressing table, filled almost to the brim with books of matches. "Give it," she said. "I know you hate people smoking, but it's my room and my lungs."

Aunt Jessie took great pleasure in people's imperfections, and she was not frightened to admit it. "Your mother had nice hair," she said, lighting up. "But she let herself go. She could have made something lovely of herself. Something attractive. She could've done that. Then maybe she wouldn't have lost your father so soon."

I was stung by that, but I just asked her to lean back on the pillows and say nothing for a while.

"Too much air isn't good for a fresh wound," I said from the walk-in cupboard, adopting her own style of medical wisdom. Through the door, I knew she would be nodding in careful assent.

"Aye," she said. "That's right. I've often heard it said."

It was time to bag up my uncle's things. Jessie had been unable to face the task herself, and that is why she called me round. Somehow the day had made me dread it, too, the suits and jerseys, the old ties, but I wanted to finish before the evening. His suits were mostly dark. Seeing

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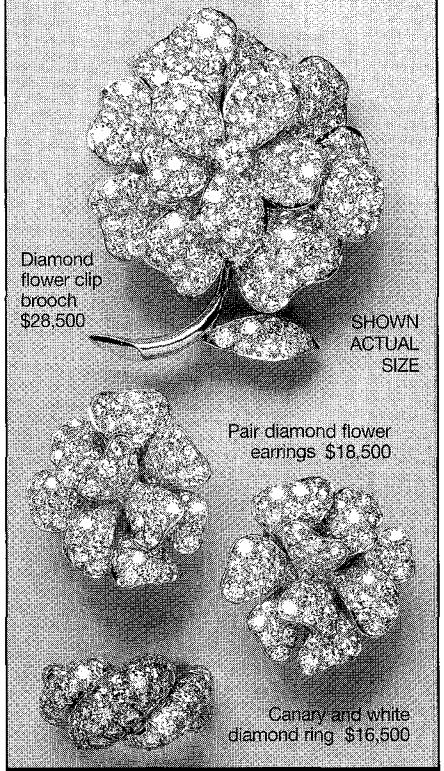
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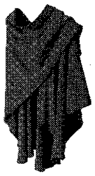

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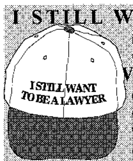
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them in a row, I thought of him coming along the beach at Saltcoats years ago, an Ayrshire day hot enough for no socks but not for the wearing of swimming costumes. Uncle Fergus loved the beach and had begged my mother to let us have the day together. He wore a starched shirt and pressed suit trousers on the beach. "That strip of land over there is the Isle of Arran," he said to my sister, his arm outstretched and his finger pointing. I hardly remember the look of the island, but I remember the cufflinks at the end of Uncle Fergus's sleeves, the Brylcreem he used, and the way he washed the picnic things after we had finished eating and made everything so neat. He seemed like someone who had a grasp on life. "You've got to make an enemy of germs," Aunt Jessie had said, and that was Uncle Fergus. His dark hair gleamed in the sun.

The suits in his cupboard now had dust on them. Each one had the scent of expired warmth, which is death to me, and some had pins on the lapels: the Bowling Club, the British Legion, the Burns Club—places where Fergus had gone in his retirement to take advantage of the cheaper drink. He had never lived in the world of designer labels, Paris and Milan, but of small Glasgow tailors who specialized in charcoal-colored fabrics, men's handkerchiefs, and hats made to order, shops run by the kind of harassed people that my uncle assumed were the mainstay of Scottish life. Yet the smell of my uncle's suits spoke that afternoon of a life given over to equal measures of piety and mockery: a touch of candle wax, a hint of sherry. I began again to feel sorry for Aunt Jessie. This was her life, and the cold suits were soon to be taken from the house.

"Don't get lost in there," she said.

"Have you a plastic bag, Aunt Jessie?"

"There's a roll of bags," she said. "Make sure there's no coins in the pockets. Fergus was a helluva man for coins. If you find any, we'll give them to the chapel. They've always got a use for coins."

Most of the suits were bagged by the time I found the letter. It was stored in an inside pocket, folded twice, with a racing tip—"Pride of Orkney, 4:30 at Ayr"—scribbled on the other side. The coat hangers lightly touched one another on the rail, their jingle the only thing to be heard apart from the sound of Jessie's breathing. She was asleep.

> I missed you at the car market. Come late tonight, Fergie. I get upset not seeing you. There's a few tins of beer in the fridge.
>
> MAY

It was a wild notelet from a perfumed box, and reading it made me think of school crushes, her name, "May," scrawled inside a briar of kisses.

It had never occurred to me before then how much I hated those Mays, those women who mess about with men. They had no business doing that. I listened to the cars passing on the road outside and wondered how many of the cars were driven by liars. It seemed only decent to wake Jessie and show her the note, to let her finally put an end to this man and his clean living. I was almost decided: there was dust on my hands, the powder of dead moths. My aunt had every right to know that her husband Fergus had spent nights drinking beer with women called May.

The hall is the loneliest place in a house. I don't know why. Maybe it's the lack of truly personal things, the darkness of a mirror, the jumble of impersonal, old-fashioned shoes, the tangle of coats that are never much worn anymore, Uncle Fergus's favorite raincoat high and useless on a wooden peg. The rug on the floor has lost its colors, but perhaps it could recall former days, the pressure of suitcases left standing by themselves in the minutes before the taxi would arrive to take my relatives to the airport, the start of another great journey to the world out there. Everyone is always looking for something else. I stood on the landing and stared down at the empty hall, turning the letter in my hands once more, before slowly tearing it up and putting the pieces into my purse.

Going down the stairs, I passed the dolls' eyes, but the light was gone and I couldn't see their details anymore. It gets strange in Ayrshire when the nights draw in: dark at four o'clock, our trees frozen in the public parks. Jessie's cat came to visit me as I sat in the living room waiting for the evening, the oil of cloves open on the table, ready for my aunt when she woke with a feeling in her mouth. Mary the cat. She leapt onto my knees when she saw a cloud of breath. I'd never known her to be so cold before, but I stroked her beautiful back and leaned down to place a kiss between her ears. "Ben's gone back," I whispered. "He's gone home for good. What do you say to that, Mary?" ♦

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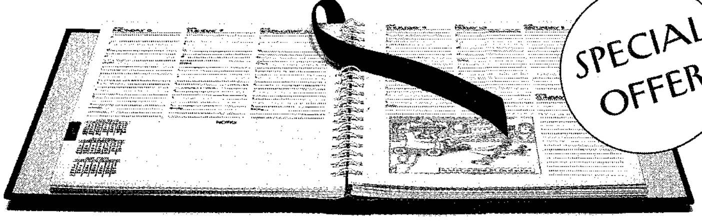

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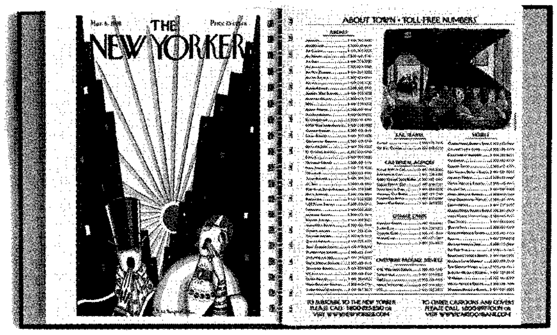
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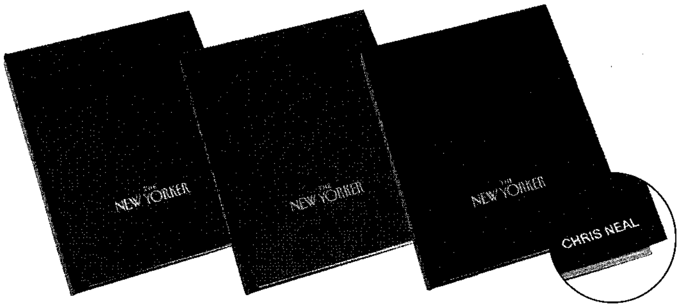
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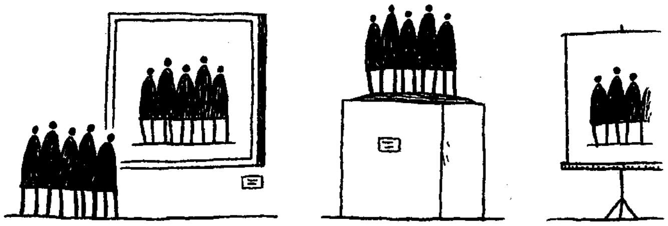


BOOKS

GYPSY

The life of Django Reinhardt.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

A happy place to spend a winter afternoon in Paris is a bar called the Chope des Puces, just outside the Clignancourt flea market. Every Sunday, for longer than anyone can remember, two battered, time-worn guitarists have met there to play, on battered, time-worn guitars, popular jazz tunes in the manner of the Gypsy jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt and his Quintet of the Hot Club of France. The ringing chords, the jaunty minor-key-ballade melodies, the peculiar heavy, heartbreak vibrato, the broken-icicle chromatic runs up and down the fretboard, all played against the steady *boom-chick, boom-chick* of the cast-iron guitar chords: the cherished Django sound is there, and something of the feeling, too. Jazz imitators are in general extremely sad—the "Dixieland" players in their straw hats trying to play like Louis Armstrong, the ghost big bands, courts without their Counts and Dukes—yet these Sunday Djangoists, like so many others throughout Paris and the world, are somehow not. There are Djangoist "hot clubs" in Norway and Denmark and San Francisco, playing a near-perfect revival sound, and the now annual Django festival in New York has just concluded at Birdland in pseudo-Gypsy conviviality. Django's manner, seemingly so inimitable, gets imitated with precision: that Hot Club de Norvège is *hot*.

How and why this should be—how an illiterate, happy-go-lucky Gypsy could have created a style that goes on creating itself—is at last the subject of serious study, in Michael Dregni's biography, "Django: The Life and Music of a Gypsy Legend" (Oxford; $35). Dregni, who writes for the magazine *Vintage Guitar*, and whose first biography this is, not only has managed to break into the French milieu of jazz aficionados and sects in which Django worked but has penetrated the Gypsy, or Romany, world from which Django emerged—a clannish world whose existence, well into the nineteen-fifties and sixties, was still largely furtive, outdoors, vagabond, and, occasionally, criminal. Dregni clears up the two much mystified areas of Django's life—what exactly he did during the Second World War, and what really happened on his one trip to America, in 1946—and he sorts through the music and, nice bonus, manages to suggest plots for at least three fine French movie musicals.

"Django" is a Romany word—the first-person singular of the verb meaning "to awake." It was the Gypsy name that Django's mother gave him when he was born, in January of 1910, in a caravan on the road in Belgium. Romany families in those days seem to have given their children both a public name—the new baby's was Jean—and a private name. (This was partly a time-honored way of avoiding conscription; the government not only never knew where you were but never quite knew your name.) Django's family, Dregni explains, were Manouche—one of the two bands of Gypsies living in France in those days. (The others called themselves Gitans.) The Manouche, it seems, were the kind of Gypsies who caused other Gypsies to raise their eyebrows, draw in their breath, and ask if perhaps these people might not be just a touch too wild and unreliable. Django, Dregni emphasizes, was not merely "of Gypsy descent"; he was, and remained, an honest-to-God caravan-and-tarot-card Romany, illiterate until well into his adulthood (and only semi-literate even then), who, when he was a celebrated musician on tour in England, still liked to stroll off into the farmland to wring the neck of a stolen chicken or two.

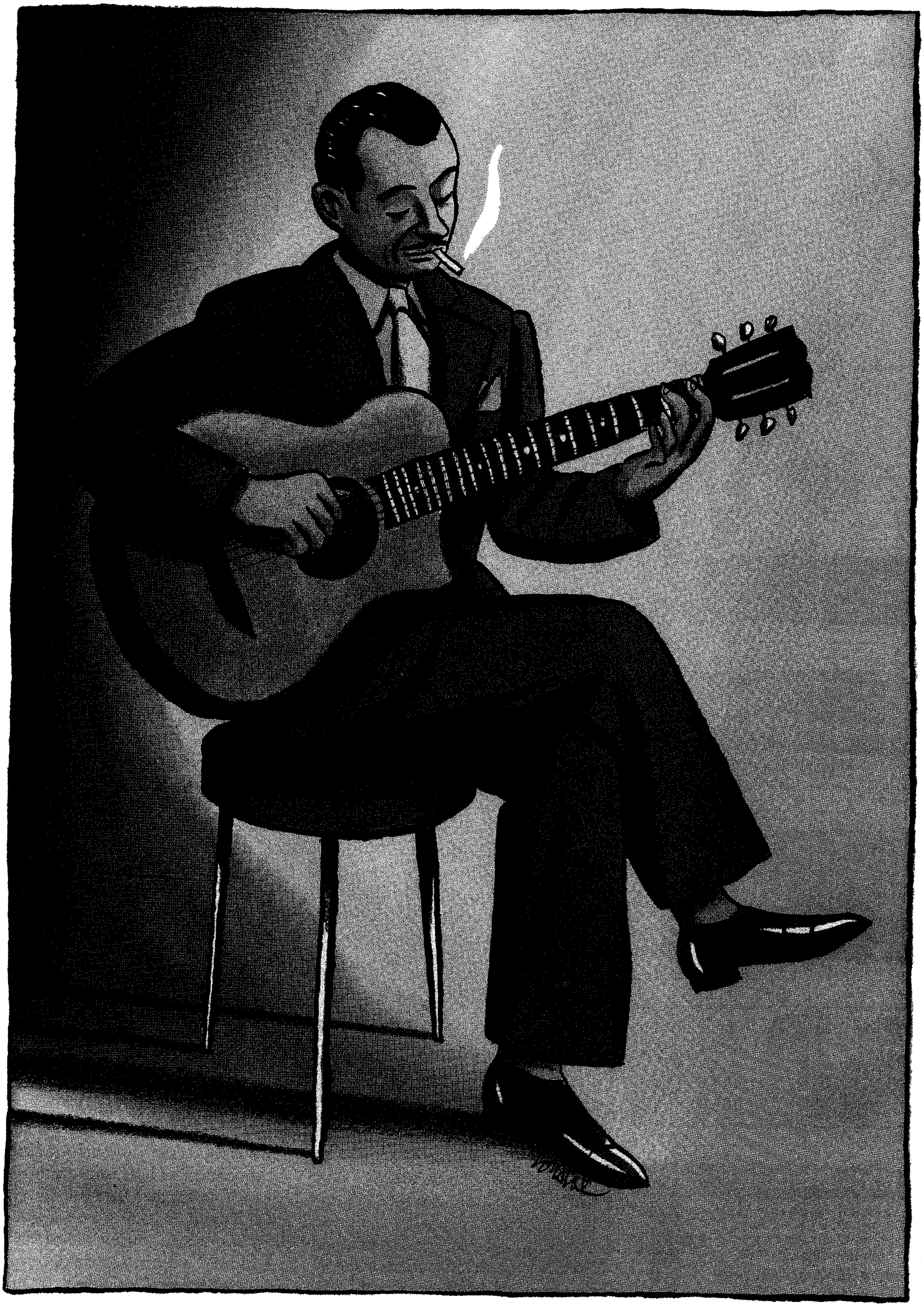
Django's father abandoned the family when the boy was still young, and Django bounced between his powerful mother and a fourteen-year-old Gypsy girl named Naguine, whom he stayed with, off and on, for the rest of his life. (A brief teen-age marriage to another Gypsy girl produced a child but not a permanent attachment.) They lived on petty theft, fortune-telling, and pass-the-hat music, and what food they could find; the Reinhardt family, in Manouche fashion, had a particular fondness for *niglos*—feral hedgehogs roasted whole with their needles on.

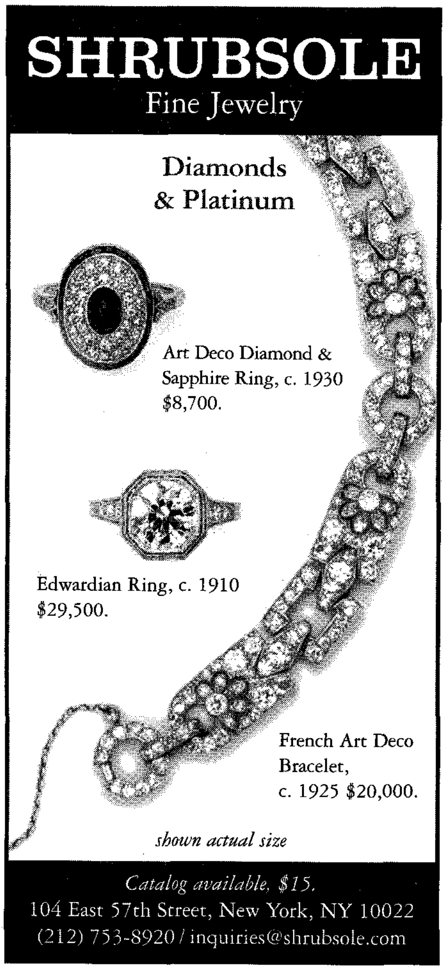
Django picked up a bastardized banjo-guitar when he was twelve, and from a Gitan virtuoso learned the stiff-armed, elbow-dependent technique that produced his loud, clear, ringing style. He was a prodigy, and quickly found work playing in a now long-lost world of popular dance-hall music: the Parisian *bal musette*. Musette was a popular urban style as rich in its way as Chicago blues or Argentinean tango, a complete alternative musical culture, a kind of marsupial jazz, driving and complex. Dregni relates its extraordinary Belle Époque history (it is the first terrific movie he outlines, if only Jacques Demy were around to make it): musette was born amid the rivalry of Auvergnat musicians with their bagpipes, Italians with their accordions, and Gypsies with their guitars, all fighting brutally until an alliance was made between the leading bagpiper's son and the leading accordionist's daughter. Soon the new style was firmly in place—swooning Italian accordionists, wailing French pipers, pumping Gypsy guitars.

That was the style into which Django

JACQUES DE LOUSTAL

Django came at jazz from a full-fledged folk-art-pop music that already raged and swirled and drove, if it did not yet swing.

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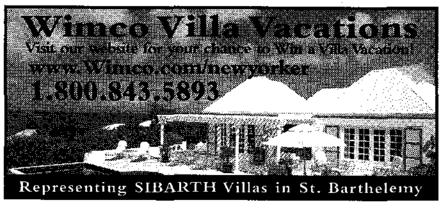
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THE NIGHT MIGRATIONS

This is the moment when you see again
the red berries of the mountain ash
and in the dark sky
the birds' night migrations.

It grieves me to think
the dead won't see them—
these things we depend on,
they disappear.

What will the soul do for solace then?
I tell myself maybe it won't need
these pleasures anymore;
maybe just not being is simply enough,
hard as that is to imagine.

—*Louise Glück*

was inducted from his very first notes. He did not struggle to get to jazz, as one might have thought, from a folk campfire or a tea dance. Instead, musette—with its driven, up-and-down *pompe* rhythms (the guitarist stroking his guitar and quickly palming the vibration) and its *zigeunerweise* minor-key laments, its thick chords, minor sixths and sevenths and ninths—already held within itself many of the elements of jazz. Django came at jazz from a full-fledged folk-art-pop music that already raged and swirled and drove, if it did not yet swing.

Yet Django, content to make whatever music was around, might never have been the man to crossbreed musette and jazz had the famous disaster of his life not happened. In October of 1928, he was caught in a caravan fire, which scorched the right side of his body and burned his entire left, or notemaking, hand. He was more than a year recovering. The pain must have been unbearable, and he permanently lost the use of his pinkie and his ring finger, except as a stiff claw to force around the fretboard. Not only did he have to learn to use his hand again; he also had to come up with an entirely new way of fingering chords, using two or, at most, three and a half fingers where he once had had five. Though Dregni tries to explain it, it still seems a fishes-and-loaves miracle that all those minor ninths and sixths were made by two gimpy fingers sliding up and down the fretboard. The accident was the turning point in Django's musical life; it forced his hand in every sense, and, for a prodigy who had always let his fingers do the thinking, it was clearly mind-expanding when the fingers had to think again. Only after he was nearly stopped from playing music at all, it seems, did he become an ambitious, self-consciously searching musician.

It was in July, 1931, on a pass-the-hat gig in the South of France, that he first heard real American jazz. Historians teach us to be suspicious of "Eureka" moments, but there are moments when something happens to make one say "Eureka," and this was one of them. Émile Savitry, an amateur painter on holiday in Toulon, heard Django play in an outdoor café, and invited him up to his apartment to listen to music, some early Armstrong 78s. Django was hooked, and transformed. "My brother! My brother!" he kept swearing, and he scarcely left the apartment for days. Shortly afterward, back in Paris, he ran into a tea-dance violinist of Italian descent named Stéphane Grappelli, who had had a similar epiphany listening to the records of Armstrong and Bix Beiderbecke. They immediately began jamming together.

Nothing might have come of this—Dregni instances the case of the equally gifted Argentinean guitarist Oscar Alemán, who made a couple of first-class jazz records in Paris but whose career went nowhere—had it not been for the intervention of the Hot Club of France and its *chefs*, Hugues Panassié and Charles Delaunay. The story of the Hot Club (and this is Dregni's second wonderful movie, a Truffaut comedy) dramatizes as well as any the French genius for recognizing the overlooked greatness of some American folk or pop form and instantly bureaucratizing that love. Panassié was independently wealthy, a jazz aficionado, and belonged to the far right, a monarchist absolutist; Delaunay was the neglected son of the great painter Robert and his wife, the designer Sonia, and was a man of the left. Yet the two Frenchmen, along with a band of like-minded listeners, formed a club (they even obtained an official police permit) based on a passionate devotion to Bix and Louis and Eddie Lang and Joe Venuti. They worshipped music that came from a country they had never seen and was sung, when it was, in a language they couldn't speak—and immediately turned it into a semi-religious avant-garde cause, complete with the requisite excommunications of members for various ideological faults. (One fault later widened to a rift, when Panassié and Delaunay simultaneously excommunicated each other over the bebop question.)

Django, then, was not just a comet; he was a cause. Panassié and Delaunay were looking for a French musician who could play jazz, rather as Sam Phillips, in Memphis twenty years later, was looking for a white boy who could sing black. It made a certain sense that they would lay their bets on Django, who, as a Gypsy, occupied a kind of honorary Negro place. They kept Grappelli and Django together—separately, the feckless guitarist and the insecure violinist might simply have gone on making the rounds of clubs and dance halls—and created the Quintet of the Hot Club of France.

The quintet, it turns out, was as much an "art" exercise as a pop one. At first, at least, it existed largely as a recording band rather than a performing group, and was there as much to prove Panassié and Delaunay's abstract point—that jazz was potentially a universal language—as to make dance records. In fact, throughout the history of the quintet, Panassié and Delaunay exerted a slightly Henry Higgins-ish pressure on the players. They got their pets to "swing" Bach, Liszt, and the French national anthem (in a wonderful version of the "Marseillaise"), and even encouraged Django, who couldn't read music, to compose a full formal symphony, a bit of which survives as the beautiful slow tune "Manoir de Mes Rêves." (There are comic-satiric elements to Panassié and Delaunay's infatuation; but Panassié wrote one of the first good books on jazz in any language.)

That something is the reflection of a cultural plot need not mean that it is a cultural scam. The marriage of Grappelli's vocal, swooping playing and Django's percussive fire—a new version, as Dregni suggests, of the original *bal musette* counterpoint between the metallic and the liquid—made for something new. They swung and sung, and were instantly recognized in England, first, and then even in America.

The lineup of the Hot Club varied, but usually included Django's brother Nin-Nin on one rhythm guitar, the Gypsy-gangster guitarist Baro Ferret on another (Ferret was by reputation as good a soloist as Django, but Django kept him tightly locked), Louis Vola on bass, Grappelli on violin, and Django on lead guitar. Their sound had two pillars, a French rhythm and a French guitar. The rhythm was that *pompe* taken over from musette; the guitar was the Selmer, and Django's music wouldn't have happened without it. The Great Guitar Problem, throughout the nineteen-thirties, was that the instrument was too soft to be heard over a band. The Selmer *modèle Jazz* guitar, invented by Mario Maccaferri, has a resonator built into its acoustic body. It is a vibrant, jangling, steel-stringed instrument, but capable of soft breezes and overheard whispers in the eye of the hailstorm. In photograph after photograph from the period, Django clutches his Selmer, with its small sounding hole, as though it were his wife.

These recordings of the thirties are the source of the world's Djangomania, and their appeal has something to do with their sheer bounce, the drummerless, up-and-down-the-merry-go-round joviality. But it has something to do, as well, with the melancholy these recordings convey, an emotion that makes the music distinctly European. American jazz had lyric players like Lester Young, demonic ones like Coleman Hawkins, and incandescent ones like Louis Armstrong, but their swinging songs are radiant with achieved happiness and their sad songs

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ballads touched by the knowing, essentially stoical sound of the blues. Billie Holiday and Young are jaunty even in defeat, blue but not out. (And you could play "West End Blues" at a funeral or a wedding, as you could play Bach.) An Old World variety of tenuous, bitter, permanent sadness, the Schubertian weltschmerz, is second nature to Django, and seeps through his slow tunes. There's a magical sequence in Martin Scorsese's much maligned "New York, New York" where the Liza Minnelli character, alone and miserable, listens to Django and Stéphane and just sinks deeper and deeper into sadness. Scorsese's instinct is right: American jazz won't let you get that low.

When the war came, a myth came with it. It was said that Django, a Gypsy in fear for his life at a time when the Nazis were sending Gypsies to the death camps, lived a furtive, frightened life on the fringes of French society, occasionally emerging to cheer his fans by striking his guitar. (Grappelli had escaped to England.) It has even been said that Matisse's postwar "Jazz" cutouts were a tribute to the reëmergence of the Gypsy genius.

As with so much else that touches on those tragic years, it isn't so, and what is so is much sadder. Dregni does a very good job of unpacking Goebbels's attitude toward jazz—that as Negro-American music it was debased but as dance music it was important to the war effort—and shows that Django played night after night in Paris, throughout the war, for an audience of cheering S.S. men and German soldiers. (Paris was kept open as a kind of night club for the troops. "Everybody once in Paris" was the promise held out to the Germans on the Western Front.) In fact, Dregni establishes that though Django tried to get out of France on a couple of occasions, he was at the height of his fame and success during the Occupation—he even opened his own club.

In a bizarre turn of history, it was the Occupation, and collaboration, that produced a true mania for jazz in France. That was when—and this is Dregni's third good movie, a sour Malle tragedy—the *zazous*, French jitterbuggers, emerged in Paris, to do at least dance-hall battle with the German soldiers. The *zazous*, tolerated and then suppressed, took what until the war had been a largely highbrow enthusiasm and turned it into a form of popular protest. For the first time, Delaunay had an audience for his music. Since he was not allowed to publish American tunes, he put French names on the recordings; "St. Louis Blues" became "La Tristesse de Saint Louis," the sadness of St. Louis, with a deliberately coded reference to the distant great Armstrong. It was during the *zazou* period that Django recorded his most famous slow tune, the beautiful, lulling "Nuages," which became one of the anthems of the Occupation.

After the war, in 1946, Django made the long-awaited trip to America. By legend, the trip was a disaster: he arrived without his Selmer, never found a guitar he liked, was booed by audiences, and was criticized by an American jazz press that had already moved on to the rockier shores of bebop. It has even been said that he showed up shamefully late for a Carnegie Hall concert with the Duke. He returned to Paris, desolate, and never quite recovered.

Dregni establishes that the trip was, by most standards, a success. Django toured with Ellington. (Ellington's sponsorship may seem puzzling, until one recalls that, as Whitney Balliett has explained, Ellington's genius had always been for identifying instinctive, mostly New Orleans musicians, whose plaintive vocal style he integrated into his own self-made sophistications.) Though Ellington wasn't able to incorporate Django into his band—probably because he couldn't read music—he used him regularly, and most of the reviews were good. ("FRENCH GUITAR ARTIST STEALS DUKE'S CONCERT" read a headline in Cleveland.) It's true that he was late for Carnegie Hall, because he was drinking with the French middleweight Marcel Cerdan, but he played—and since when has a jazz musician's reputation suffered from lateness? ("Tardy: The Complete Boxed Set of the Late Starters.") He liked travelling with Ellington's band; he liked the loud flowered boxer shorts the musicians wore to sleep in on the train. And bebop, to the degree that Django absorbed it, was, in its breakneck speeds and riffy, nervous agitation, a welcome music to him.

The trouble wasn't that he didn't have his own guitar; it was that the new guitars he had to use to play American concert

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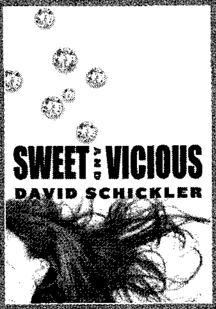

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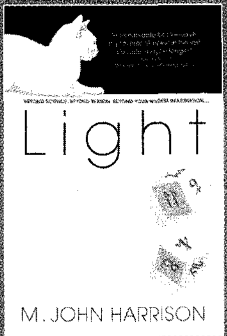

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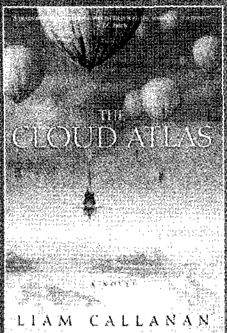

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halls were a problem for him. The guitar-volume problem had been solved, directly, by the electric guitar, which Benny Goodman's guitarist Charlie Christian had instantly turned into a singing, horn-like, bending instrument. Django, more or less compelled to play one, got his hands on an early Gibson electric and played it throughout his American stay. This may explain both the general enthusiasm for his playing—Django once borrowed a clown's metal toy guitar and played it; he couldn't play *badly*—and a certain hollowness to that enthusiasm. Django on electric guitar is still virtuosic (listen to "Blues Riff," one of the few surviving records of his stay with Ellington), but oddly generic and un-Django-ish. He can't punctuate his solos; he stops to make the last note of a phrase ring out and it just glides back into the amplified stream of echoing, fluid notes. He can play his instrument, but he can't make his points. One sees, or hears, why listeners would have been impressed by him without being much moved. And an unemotional Django is no Django at all.

When he returned to France, he continued to play, sometimes wonderfully. Dregni makes a strong case for his later, more disciplined electric music, but a lot of the later music deliberately evokes the thirties in a style already archaic. Oddly, it was only after his death, in 1953, that his music began to be imitated. By now, Dregni tells us, Django's jazz *is* Gypsy music, the solos passed on from father to son note by note. He escaped a folk music only to make one.

Which returns us to the mystery—why do Django imitators persist, and move us? Part of it is that the tone, with its signature heavy vibrato, *is* imitable. And part of it is that the time is short; there is not much second- and third-act Django. But surely another reason we respond is that few artists are so tied to a place; Django is Paris, modern tragic-beautiful Paris, broken Paris, imaginary Paris, fallen Paris, happy Paris, and the emotions of the city still pour out of his music, whoever plays it. When an artist belongs so entirely to a single decade, even the catastrophic decade of Europe from the mid-thirties to the mid-forties, then hearing his music revived revives the era, and reminds us that even the hardest times are human times, filled with music. There is something at once terrifying and beauti-

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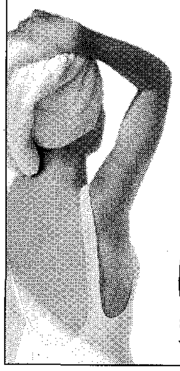

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ful in the thought that, while half a million Gypsies died, this Gypsy jazzman went on making music neither demonic nor mad but merely sad and lovely. By reviving an artist's time, we revive both his resistance to it and his response.

Is there a Django legacy beyond the enthusiasts and imitators? Charlie Christian, for instance, can be heard everywhere in modern jazz guitar, from the octaves of Wes Montgomery to the runs of Herb Ellis. Except in forward-looking revivalists like the Pizzarellis, Django is less audible. The later musician he most resembles is, perhaps, not a jazzman at all but Jimi Hendrix, who is similarly central and sui generis. Hendrix, after all, stepped outside an African-American identity to embrace that of a Gypsy (one of his bands was called the Band of Gypsys), just as Django stepped outside his Gypsy identity to explore an African-American one. Even Jimi's "Star-Spangled Banner" is anticipated by Django's "Marseillaise," and there is a tiny two-bar scrap at the beginning of the 1935 Decca recording of "St. Louis Blues" that sounds eerily like the famous opening stutter of "Purple Haze."

Did the young black bluesman ever hear the old Gypsy? It's hard to think not, and there are passages of mandolin-like, chromatic glissing in Hendrix that do sound distinctively Django-ish. More important, both guitarists have a knack for floating in and out of styles and movements, because they are sound makers before they are note shapers. It is not the note-order of the solos, as it is with Armstrong, or Clapton, but the musical atmosphere that overwhelms one. Django is a "musical impressionist," as Dregni writes, as opposed to a draftsman, and so was Hendrix. And both were essentially lyrical players too often buried by their audiences' need for flash and speed; but listen to Django's famous "Improvisation" and then Hendrix's equally famous introduction to "Little Wing," and hear the same poetry of full-bar chords up and down the neck of the guitar, and the same ringing, sighing songfulness.

Dregni ends his book in the Chope des Puces bar, near the flea market, listening to the two Gypsy musicians who keep Django's music alive. Their names, it turns out, are Mondine and Ninine Garcia, they are in a direct line of musical descent from Django, and they are, it seems, still playing every Sunday. ♦

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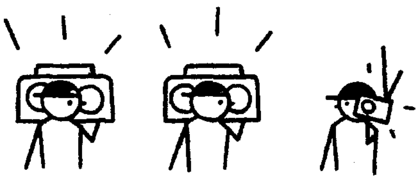
BRIEFLY NOTED

Performing Arts

George Balanchine, *by Robert Gottlieb (HarperCollins; $19.95).* Balanchine's reputation as a choreographer is so immense that his personality can be eclipsed, at least for those who never knew him. Gottlieb, an ardent fan since 1948, did come to know him a bit while serving on the board of New York City Ballet. In this brief yet energetic biography, he moves briskly through an extraordinarily eventful life. The early chapters detail Balanchine's fine musical education in Russia (piano, harmony, counterpoint), his dancing (curtailed by an injury when he was in his twenties), and his many false starts as he tried to gain a foot-hold in the West. A colleague of the period recalled performances in an insane asylum and a beer garden ("We followed a dog act"). Once in the States, Balanchine embraced every aspect of his new home, working on Broadway and in Hollywood, wearing bolo ties, and—in such works as "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue"—adapting the vocabulary of classical dance to the rhythms of America.

The Rose & the Briar, *edited by Greil Marcus and Sean Wilentz (Norton; $26.95).* In books like "Invisible Republic" and "Lipstick Traces," the rock critic Greil Marcus developed an ability to discern an art movement, or an entire country, lurking inside a song. This is no longer a singular approach; it has become a critical style, as the current volume demonstrates. Many of the writers strain to match Marcus's insights, and eighty poetic pages go by before Sarah Vowell's excellent essay about the transformation of "John Brown's Body" into "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." From there, things pick up steam. Luc Sante shadows the ghost of the New Orleans musician Buddy Bolden, and Paul Berman does a meticulous job of tracking the mariachi ballad "Volver, Volver" from Mexico to the counter of the Fast & Fresh deli in Brooklyn.



The Inner Voice, *by Renée Fleming. (Viking; $24.95).* Classical-music insiders are not the only audience for this book, a kind of professional autobiography that mixes Letters to a Young Singer-style technical advice ("Taking a vague vocal concept from another singer is a little bit like sinking your life's savings into a stock tip you overhear at a cocktail party") with day-in-the-life bits that show how difficult it is to attain—and sustain—the life of a superstar. Occasional touches of writerly flair suggest the hand of Fleming's friend and collaborator Ann Patchett, but some of the best passages (such as a moment-by-moment account of singing the role of Violetta in a performance of Verdi's "La Traviata" at the Met) have a no-nonsense appeal that fits the image of Fleming as an unpretentious but deeply ambitious artist, driven forward by a sense of inadequacy yet buoyed by a keen awareness of her gifts.

The Victorian Marionette Theatre, *by John McCormick (Iowa; $24.95).* The historian and puppeteer John McCormick conjures Britain's nineteenth-century marionette theatre, where travelling companies played in rickety wood-and-canvas tents to entertainment-starved hordes who were warmed by open coke fires, ale, and prostitutes. The bankruptcy-prone troupes also sold hot peas, potatoes, and chocolate to supplement the meagre gate and voyaged as far as Probolingo, Java, in search of audiences. Their repertory favored melodrama and farce, and leaned on the special effect: puppet acrobats worked trapezes, dragons spewed fire, skeletons scattered and reassembled under the influence of hidden magnets. In time, the rural spectators, who admired the marionette theatre's realism and novelty, abandoned it for cinema; fortunately, they were replaced by a smaller, avant-garde audience that prized its artifice and antique patina.

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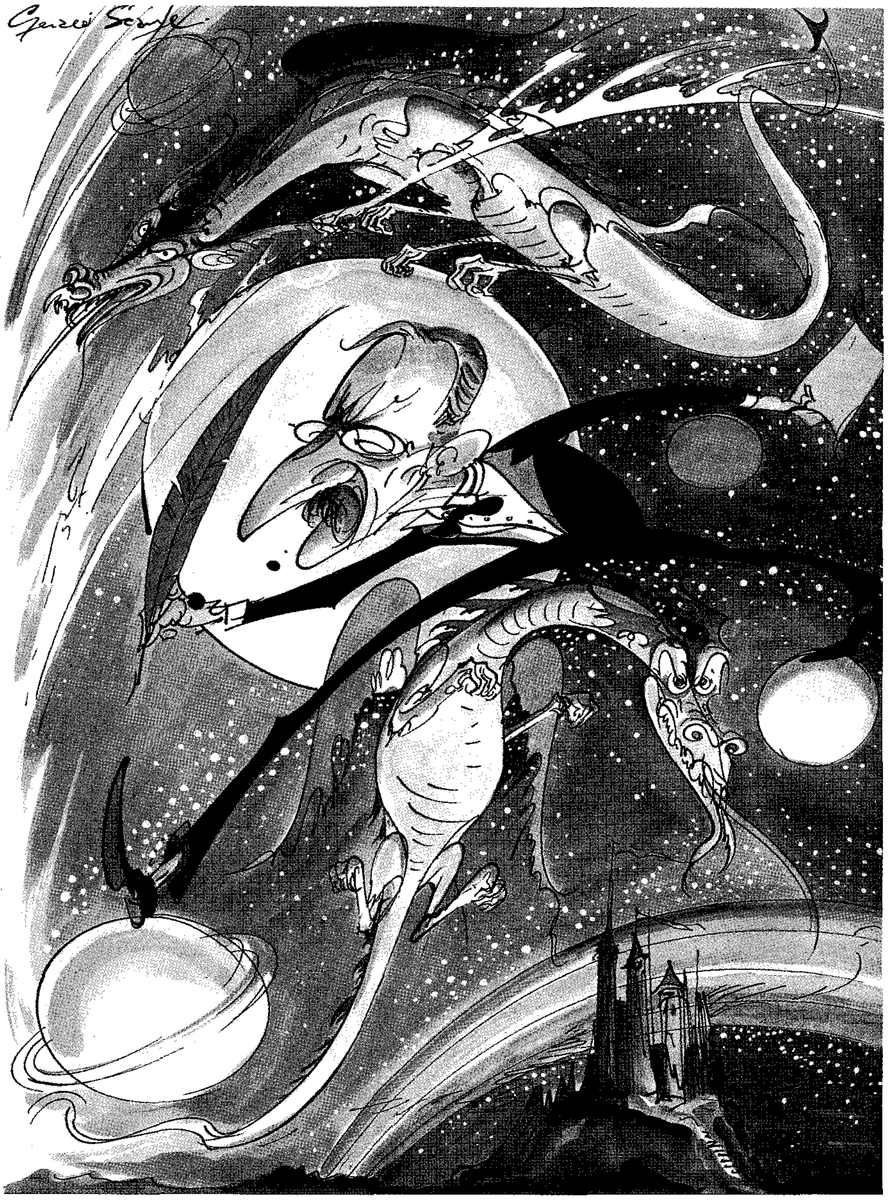
MINOR MAGUS

The fantastical writings of Lord Dunsany.

BY LAURA MILLER



Heedless of fashion, Dunsany explored the rarefied purlieus of his own imagination.

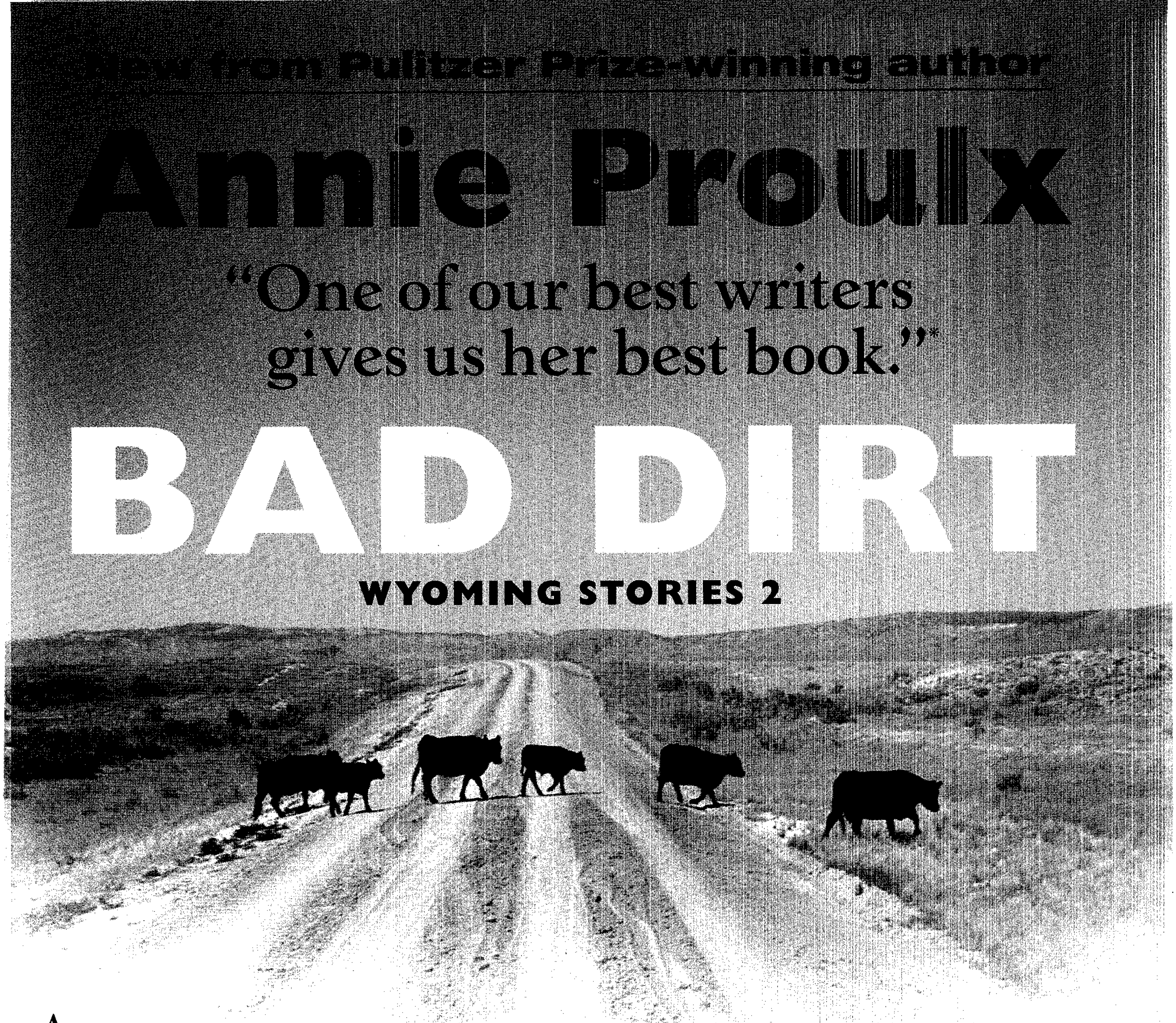
Few things troubled the sunny complacency of Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, the eighteenth Baron Dunsany, but the prospect of being considered a dilettante and a small talent stood foremost among them. He had reason to hope that it would be otherwise. After knocking around for the first few years of the twentieth century, engaging in the typical pursuits of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy—hunting, soldiering, cricket, and an unsuccessful run for Parliament—he'd tried his hand at writing. He had to pay to put out his first book, in 1905, a sui-generis work of invented, quasi-Oriental mythology titled "The Gods of Pegāna," but he had no trouble finding publishers after that. W. B. Yeats, then the leader of the Irish Renaissance, described him as "a man of genius," and produced his plays at the Abbey Theatre. Most of Dunsany's plays were popular, and his verse was once such common currency that young Amory Blaine, the hero of F. Scott Fitzgerald's "This Side of Paradise," takes to reciting it to the accompaniment of graphophone music during his "decadent" phase at Princeton.

By the nineteen-thirties, however, Dunsany's sort of writing had fallen drastically out of favor, and his reputation—unlike that of Oscar Wilde, another passion of Amory Blaine's freshman year—has never recovered. He became estranged from Yeats, and when the poet co-founded the Irish Academy of Letters, in 1932, Dunsany was offered only an associate membership. Full membership, he was told, was reserved for those who wrote about Ireland and the Irish. Dunsany's settings tended to be imaginary, the bejewelled domains of scimitar-wielding warriors, kings, beggars, thieves, and prophets answering to pagan pantheons that bore scant resemblance to the Celtic legends that Yeats loved. Dunsany was upset, and the Irish poet and literary gadfly Oliver St. John Gogarty would later joke that the Academy had been "founded to keep Dunsany out." Gogarty, like Dunsany, saw it as a personal snub. (Dunsany was admitted as a full member only years later.)

The decades between Dunsany's promising start and his exclusion from Ireland's literary élite had seen the nation split on the question of home rule. While many intellectuals, like Yeats, became increasingly committed to the cause of Irish independence—a goal largely achieved with the creation of the Irish Free State, in 1922—others, like Dunsany, supported continued union with England. And yet, despite the pitch of feeling surrounding Irish nationalism and home rule, Yeats hadn't quarrelled with Dunsany over politics. No one did, really. Even Dunsany's nationalist neighbors in County Meath overlooked his reactionary rantings. This, more than the judgment of the Academy, should have been a warning. If his political views weren't taken seriously in the Ireland of the nineteen-twenties and thirties, could anything else about him be?

The journey to obscurity, when it starts from a vantage as eminent as Dunsany's, is often as idiosyncratic as

GERALD SCARFE



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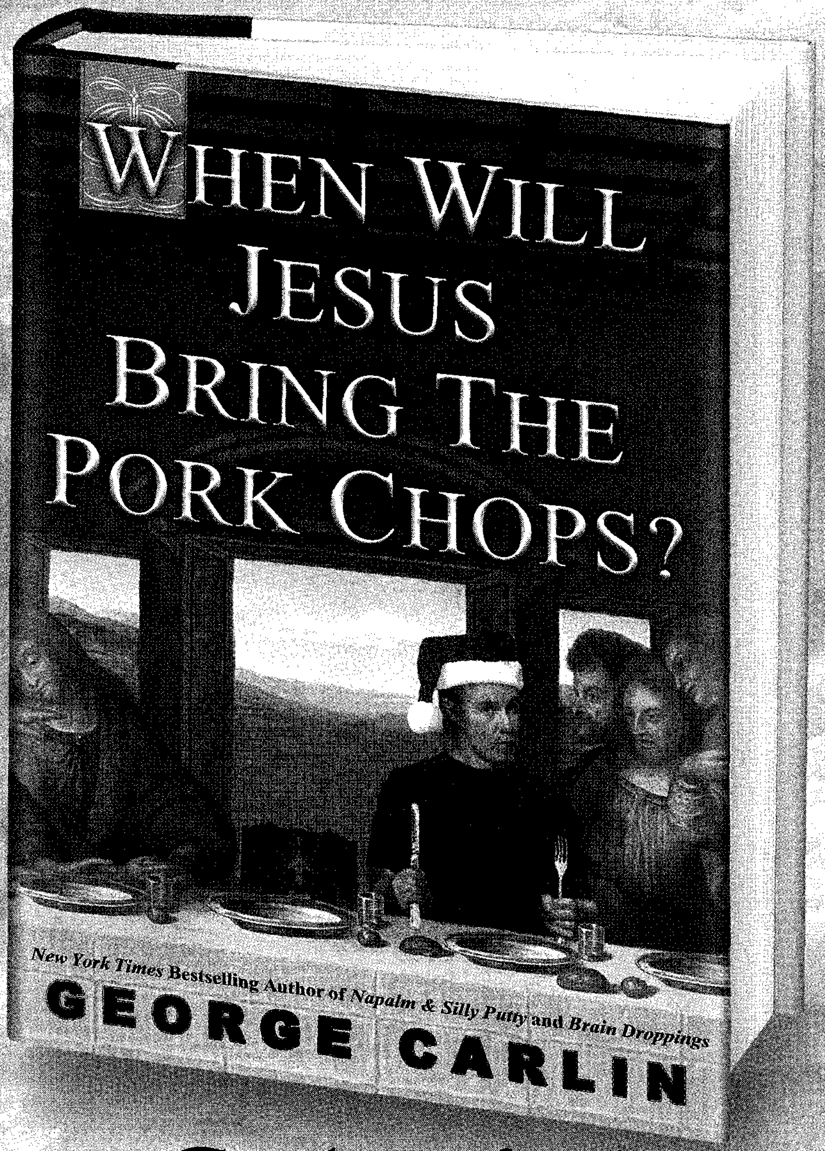
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the path to glory. How did a writer of talent—a writer whom Yeats compared to Baudelaire, and who once had five plays on in New York at the same time—wind up nearly, if not quite, forgotten? Dunsany continued to write and publish stories, poetry, memoirs, and novels until his death, in 1957. He never felt that he got the recognition he deserved, something he attributed to the vagaries of literary fashion, especially the ascendancy of such "*frightful* nonsense" as the verse of T. S. Eliot. He became, as Mark Amory, in a 1972 biography of Dunsany, says, "an Edwardian survival out of tune with the times." If not for contemporary advocates of fantasy fiction, who see him as a pioneer of the genre, a new selection of his tales, "In the Land of Time," from Penguin Classics ($14), would surely never have appeared. It is too easy, however, to blame Dunsany's disappointments on the fickleness of public taste. Modernism happened for a reason, and so did Dunsany's slow drift to the margins of literary renown.

Too much good fortune can derail an artist, and few writers are born as fortunate as Dunsany. He was as handsome, clever, and rich as Austen's Emma Woodhouse and equally lacking in troublesome self-knowledge. He was born in 1878, the eldest son of the seventeenth Lord Dunsany. In "Patches of Sunlight," the first of three volumes of memoirs, he gives the impression of having been a somewhat lonely boy. His mother was moody, and his father worsened his already poor health by experimenting with drugs and self-administered X rays. Dunsany's father died in 1899, leaving his twenty-one-year-old son in possession of a venerable title, a comfortable fortune, a country house in England, and the family castle in County Meath.

Indifferently educated at Eton and the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, Dunsany nevertheless acquired undying admiration for the Romantic poets and the cadences of the King James Bible. In 1899, he joined the Coldstream Guards and sailed off to South Africa to fight in the Boer War. It was the beginning of a lifelong enthusiasm for mortal peril, a condition that Dunsany embraced with the blithe physical courage of someone who never expects that he will be the one to be injured. Of his initiation under a hail of Boer bullets, he coolly wrote, "I have no wish to say anything critical of anyone's shooting, or to belittle some rifle that may be dear to its owner, but I cannot see why they did not get the whole lot of us." The African landscape, with its vast, parched stretches of unpeopled wilderness, sunk in more deeply; lonely deserts became one of his favorite fictional settings.

Out of the Army and at loose ends, Dunsany, at twenty-six, had the luck, or sense, to marry well. His wife, Beatrice Villiers, was a daughter of the Earl of Jersey, and for the next fifty-three years she lovingly tolerated his eccentricities, even as they blossomed into full-fledged crankishness: the elderly Dunsany would hold forth at length on the evils of "adulterated" commercial table salt (he carried his own supply of rock salt everywhere) and forbade the use of furniture polish in his home (it had to be applied when his back was turned).

It was during his courtship of Beatrice that Dunsany began to dabble in writing. Through his uncle, a politician, he had already encountered members of the Irish literary scene, including Yeats and George William Russell, a poet of the Celtic revival who wrote under the pseudonym Æ. The prestige of Dunsany's title and his occasional offers of cash to support literary projects certainly helped make him welcome, but his work was genuinely admired as well. Today, when writers churn out mass-market paperbacks of generic fantasy fiction by the crate, it's easy to forget how original Dunsany's phantasmagorical lands and mythologies must have seemed. His contemporaries marvelled at his knack for coining evocative names and at his style, praised by Gogarty for being "as pure, fabulous and as rare as the unicorn."

Dunsany's first book, "The Gods of Pegāna" (included in its entirety in the Penguin volume), related the cosmogony of the imaginary island nation of Pegāna in a prose style that mimics the archaic cadences of the Bible. This imitation is so persuasive that few have noticed how little understanding of religious feeling its author shows. Pegāna has gods of dust, of silence, and of "little dreams and fancies" but no gods or goddesses of the harvest, of war, or of love—pretty much

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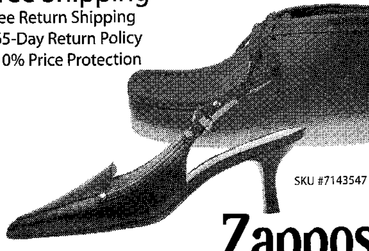

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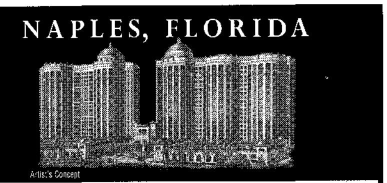

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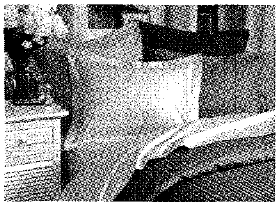
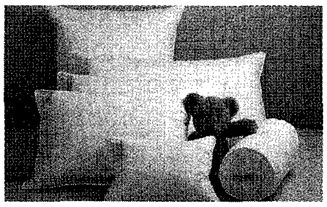


After earning a business degree, he took a job with a manufacturer of high-end down sleeping bags. Quickly learning the business, he set aside half of his hourly wage of $3.50 until he had $2,500. Add a $2,500 loan from his mom, and Warm Things was born in his Berkeley home. Sharon, his



wife, joined him within six months, ensuring their success. Thirty-one years later, Warm Things continues to thrive with integrity and spirit. High quality and great value keep customers coming back. Warm Things has grown to include down comforters, covers, feather beds, down robes, slippers, vests, throws, pillows, and sheets.

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the core curriculum for heathen deities. Dunsany's creation is a sumptuous pageant of Symbolist exotica that lies closer in spirit to Aubrey Beardsley and *The Yellow Book* than to any actual sacred text. The myths that Dunsany concocted elaborate on the futility of human ambitions and even the ephemerality of the gods themselves, who will vanish into nothingness on the awakening of a still older creator, called Māna-Yood-Sushāi. "We are the gods," these divinities chant. "We are the little games of Māna-Yood-Sushāi that he hath played and hath forgotten." Dunsany, himself an atheist, seemed indifferent to the needs that religions arise to answer: for hope, or meaning, or a sense that the universe is directed by entities not unlike ourselves. What Dunsany liked about gods was their empyrean vantage point, remote from the world and amused by human striving.

This fatalistic irony hints at Dunsany's subterranean influence on some canonical modernists and postmodernists. Jorge Luis Borges, compiling a list of thirty-three "prologues" to his seminal story "The Library of Babel," included Dunsany's story "Idle Days on the Yann" alongside works by Kafka, Henry James, and Voltaire. Like many of Dunsany's stories, "Idle Days on the Yann" largely neglects character and plot in favor of mood and what Dunsany would call "wonder." The narrator obtains passage on a boat named Bird of the River. The rest of the story is an account of the fabulous cities that the ship's company visits on its journey seaward. In Mandaroon, for example, "the ways seemed untrodden, and moss was thick on the doorsteps; in the marketplace huddled figures lay asleep. A scent of incense came wafted through the gateway, of incense and burned poppies, and there was a hum of the echoes of distant bells." A sentinel chases off the visitors, warning that "when the people of this city wake the gods will die."

"Idle Days on the Yann" often anticipates the imaginary travelogues of Italo Calvino. In one interlude, the narrator flees the doomed city of Perdondaris when he sees that one of its gates is made of a single enormous piece of ivory and suspects, correctly, that the beast it came from "was perhaps even then looking for his other tusk." Dun-

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sany, however, usually balanced his extravagant fantasies with attentive observations of the natural world:

> And now the birds of the jungle came flying home far over us, with the sunlight glistening pink upon their breasts, and lowered their pinions as soon as they saw the Yann, and dropped into the trees. And the widgeons began to go up the river in great companies, all whistling, and then would suddenly wheel and all go down again.

In 1909, at Yeats's urging, Dunsany wrote his first play, "The Glittering Gate." Free of the brocaded trappings of "The Gods of Pegāna," it exhibits the author's fatalism all the more starkly. Two recently deceased thieves stand before the locked gate of Heaven. One has been there for a while, opening an endless series of beer bottles, each of which proves to be empty. The other manages to jimmy the lock on the gate, expecting to find "orchards full of apples," a host of angels, and his beloved mother on the other side. The gate swings open to reveal "empty night and stars," and a "cruel and violent laugh" rings out over the scene.

This bleak comic parable became a hit when it was first staged, a month after it was written, at the Abbey Theatre. Read today, it seems a jovial foretaste of existentialism—music-hall Beckett. For all his artistic conservatism, Dunsany had more than an inkling of the void that the modernists tried to map. Borges, in particular, was drawn to this, and in his essay "Kafka and His Precursors" he finds some of Kafka's "idiosyncrasy" in the Dunsany story "Carcassonne." It tells of a king who vows to defy a prophecy that he will never come to Carcassonne. The king marches his army off to find the city, but after many years the king and his minstrel are all that remain of the army, and they fail, as prophesied, to reach the city, which can only ever be glimpsed on the horizon.

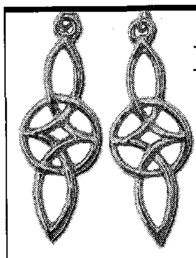
These scenarios sound like the product of a reserved, depressive personality—someone like Kafka. Dunsany, however, the vain, antlike struggles of his characters notwithstanding, seemed to regard his own life as a most amusing game, made of equal parts theatrics and sharpshooting. He wrote with a quill pen in the tower of the castle that his family had occupied since 1190, and carried a gold-handled walking stick given to him by the Nabob of Rampur during a visit to India. He pursued big game in Africa, at a time when an ambitious expedition into the bush required having seventy-two African bearers and hiring a guide who, he wrote Beatrice, was sought "by the police of so many countries." While staying with the Maharaja of Gwalior in the nineteen-twenties, he insisted on shooting a tiger face to face, instead of from the top of a stone tower thoughtfully provided for that purpose.

In the opinion of Mark Amory, "it was never to be finally decided whether Dunsany was a writer who shot or a sportsman who wrote." Or, for that matter, a chess champion who shot and wrote. (Dunsany was proficient enough to play Capablanca, the Cuban world champion, to a draw.) Like many members of his class, he was a consummate amateur. If not for his unusual facility of composition, Dunsany might not have bothered to write at all: he dashed off "The Glittering Gate" in a single afternoon, and then only after Yeats threatened to give the idea to somebody else. Yeats spotted Dunsany's indolence early on and blamed it on his station in life, writing to a friend in 1911:

> He is a man in whose genius I believe, though I am very doubtful whether it will ever come to anything. . . . I am trying to make a dramatist of him. But he doesn't know how to revise his work, and he has little patience. He is splendid for a scene and then it all goes to pieces. . . . It is a great misfortune to be born in the Peerage, life is too pleasant for him. Fifty pounds a year and a drunken mistress would be the making of him.

Dunsany, for his part, wrote, "The greatest barrier over which my dreams have had to climb appears to have been the belief that titled dilettantes trying to write, in order to take the bread out of the mouths of honest men, should be discouraged by every man of independent spirit." Nothing irked him more than intimations that he had paid or used his title to get his work published or staged.

Dunsany's remarkable good fortune stuck with him in the First World War; he narrowly escaped being sent to Gallipoli in 1915 and survived a brief stint in the trenches in France in 1917, gathering information for propaganda purposes. However, in 1916, during the Irish nationalists' Easter Rebellion, Dun-



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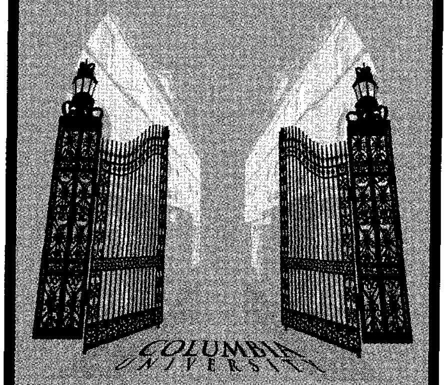

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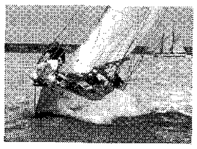

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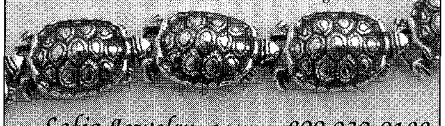

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sany suffered the only serious wound of his long romance with danger. When news of the rebellion reached him in his castle, he rushed to Dublin and blundered into twenty nationalist riflemen. He was shot at and a fragment of lead lodged under his left eye. He was hospitalized behind enemy lines, and, despite his unionist sympathies, his connections insured good treatment; an anonymous admirer had a "dainty chop" sent over every day. Nonetheless, the wound left him with a facial scar and perhaps an emotional one, too. For several months, he was plagued by dreams of his own death.

Such thoughts were in keeping with the times, for the Great War had already assumed its role as his generation's nightmare. The ruling classes had sent their young men off to fight on the front lines, and, although Dunsany himself escaped the carnage, both he and Beatrice lost many close friends. The war's toll is the only real shadow to cross the militantly cheerful pages of "Patches of Sunlight." The war precipitated a vast project of self-examination among European and British artists and intellectuals. The old ways of life, everyone felt, had vanished. Even those writers who preferred, like Dunsany, to set their fiction in wholly imaginary worlds—Tolkien is the best-known example—felt their work shaped by the war's horrors. Dunsany had some sense of what was called for; he published a collection of wartime sketches that he had written for the propaganda office. But even the title of the book, "Unhappy Far-Off Things," suggests that the old detachment remained in place. Most writers have a pet word or image, one that finds its way again and again into the work and provides a key to its author's temperament. For Dunsany, that word was "little." He wrote of little gods, little tales, little dreams, little fancies. The people in his novels and stories are little, too, as if viewed through the wrong end of a telescope, and he was unwilling, or unable, to bring them up to life-size.

The public's appetite for the dandified art of the turn of the century faded in the wake of the First World War, but Dunsany's opinion of his own work hardened into a stance of defiant aestheticism. Ideas were anathema to him. Dunsany considered himself a high priest of Beauty, an advocate of art for art's sake. Oscar Wilde died before his poses and proclamations began to look silly; Dunsany, so much luckier in life, if not in fame, lingered on.

As Dunsany got older, his fiction became less exclusively fantastical. He regarded this, ruefully, as a falling off. (The American horror writer H. P. Lovecraft, who was powerfully influenced by Dunsany, agreed.) Nonetheless, he revealed a flair for epigrammatic social comedy of the type perfected by Saki. He worked his travels into a series of stories narrated by a character named Jorkens, a member of a London club who can be persuaded, when plied with whiskey, to relate tall tales about his exploits in distant lands. Dunsany thought the Jorkens stories inferior to his more high-flown fantasies, but "The Collected Jorkens," a three-volume edition from Night Shade Books ($35 each), reveals them to be funny, inventive, and at times—by Dunsany's standards—even moving. As diversions, they have a happy, Wodehousian appeal; but they hardly seem the work of a once celebrated "genius" (an informal designation that Dunsany clung to till the last).

Hunger and some collegial competition might have prompted Dunsany to push his gifts further, but he was too comfortably situated to be motivated by either. "Genius," he pronounced in a letter to a friend, "is in fact an infinite capacity for not taking pains." In other words, "genius" was another kind of aristocracy, nurtured by similar policies of avoidance. To work too hard or too earnestly at any profession would amount to questioning the premise underlying Dunsany's own excellent position in life: the idea that exalted status is a matter of blood rather than sweat. He found it easier to settle into a modest literary career and to gripe about the laurels he was denied than to apply his gifts to the contemplation of difficult and possibly disappointing truths. Once he started, where would it end? For a moment, perhaps, he considered it, but the moment passed. According to Amory, in 1919 Dunsany took out a new notebook in which he intended to answer the challenge of the day and pasted into it a line clipped from a newspaper: "It is a great responsibility to have survived the war." The book remained blank. ♦

THE ART WORLD

EASY TO LOOK AT

Old favorites in the new MOMA.

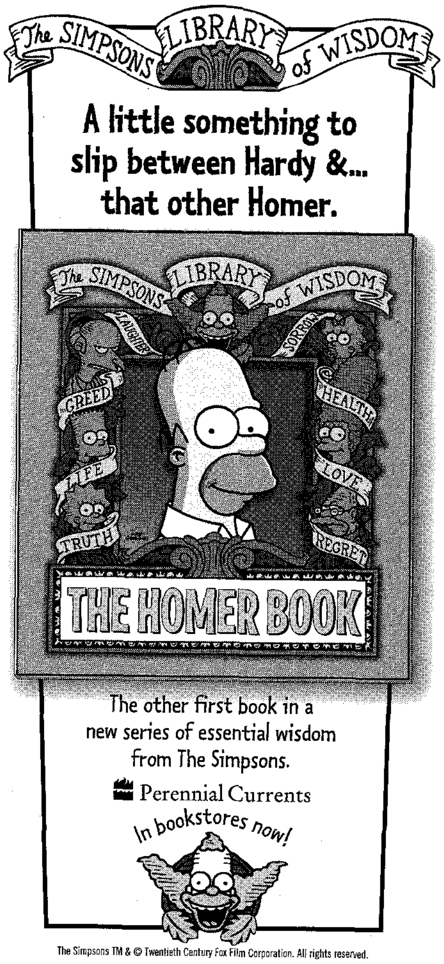
BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

When the Museum of Modern Art opened in six rooms on Fifty-seventh Street, in 1929, it was a cause. Reopened now in a lustrous building by the architect Yoshio Taniguchi, MOMA is an effect: historical, conservative, magisterial. It works. The devout, incredibly expensive perfectionism of the building's lapidary joinery and excruciating lighting may cloy—the God in these details is a neat-freak—but it optimizes looking. That's all that really matters for the expanded display of a collection whose quantity magnifies its quality. (How deep into storage of pre-nineteen-sixties work might MOMA curators dig before hitting a seam of mediocre objects? We'll never know.) So intense is a viewer's communion with the art there that any couple of rooms can exhaust a day's supply of attentiveness. (The extortionate twenty-dollar admission price will force everyone with more than a feeble interest in art to buy a membership, for seventy-five dollars.) The museum even errs grandly: the mammoth spaces for contemporary work, on the second floor, might seem to position MOMA to arbitrate art's future, but they are apt to afflict it. What mere working artist can fail to disappoint when thrust upon such a stage? Anyway, the present scale of those spaces—which will be reconfigured as need arises, though how will curators cope with the sky-high ceiling?—is already anachronistic, keyed to the four-decade-old, ever-wearier reign of postminimalism: sprawling environmental works, conceptual theatrics, Richard Serra sculpture. Today's most captivating new art runs to sizes small and medium. Like a brilliant ocean liner, adrift at midnight, the new MOMA awes while going nowhere. All aboard.

The first fun thing to do at the museum is to deconstruct its curators' initial installation. This begins—in the crowd-friendly lobby and, beetling above it, the immense atrium—with a number of works that function as icons of the museum's creed, notably Rodin's 1898 "Monument to Balzac" (standing for the romance of the artist as hero), Barnett Newman's 1963-69 "Broken Obelisk" (evangelical abstraction), and an old standby, the museum's pesky little 1945 Bell-47D1 helicopter (platonic functionalism). (The design curator Terence Riley calls it "our 'Winged Victory.' ") Paintings by Joan Miró, Ellsworth Kelly, and Roy Lichtenstein forecast humanist poetry, formal rigor, and pep. Others, by Willem de Kooning, Jasper Johns, and Brice Marden, declare MOMA's home-town loyalty to themes and variations of New York School painting. The hanging of Monet's great three-panel "Water Lilies" mural in the atrium is a mistake. It is just large enough, at forty-two feet long, to stand out in the palatial architecture, which humiliates it. Seen from afar, the hypersensitive, noble work—whose wraparound deployment in its own alcove was a jewel of the old building—suggests a big, soiled Band-Aid.

SEYMOUR CHWAST

The Newman centers and dominates the atrium as if it were designed for that purpose. Having seen the work, or a sibling version of it, over the years at different sacral sites (a reflecting pool at the Menil Collection, in Houston; the plaza of the Seagram Building), I still can't decide what I think of it. Twenty-five feet high, in rust-colored steel, it is an upside-down obelisk resting on the point of a pyramid that has a plinth-like skirt, raised from the floor. The jagged bumps atop it, representing brokenness, feel ad hoc. Apostrophizing the then consummated epoch of Abstract Expressionism, when modern art definitively triumphed in American culture, "Broken Obelisk" stirs warring feelings—ecstatic assent, vertiginous doubt—that have attended the fitful ambitions of artists since the nineteenth century to establish cosmopolitan, secular equivalents of religion. Newman had a preacherly wit, compounded of passionate aestheticism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and a touch of the charlatan. Is "Broken Obelisk" a prophetic masterpiece or pompous shuck and jive? Its shape evokes an exclamation point, but it affects me like a straightened-out question mark. I admire the nerve of placing it at the heart of an institution in which so much wealth and faith are solemnly invested, and where audacity is otherwise scarce.

I was amused, at the evening opening that I attended, by a negative consensus that emerged in the crowd, evincing the hysteria of sophisticates who find themselves momentarily at a loss for anything to disdain—apart from the grab-bag miscellany of works in the contemporary galleries, which incurred easy, contradictory complaints. (Some yawned at the predictable names, from Serra to Matthew Barney; others deplored oddities, like vitrines of wee ceramics by Charles LeDray and of mirrored-glass vessels by Josiah McElheny. The choices hardly matter, because everything looks lost.) The hanging of Matisse's "Dance (I)" in a stairwell was deemed an outrage—never mind that the picture was designed, in 1909, for a landing in the Moscow home of the Russian collector Sergei Shchukin. To my eye, the painting's decorative éclat and kinetic magnetism are amplified when beheld from the shifting vantages of the MOMA staircase. And a lone departure from standard installation seems harmless enough. The lesson I draw from this tiny furor is that New York has become an old city, dogmatically loyal to conventions of aesthetic propriety that we absorbed, in our youths, very largely from MOMA. The Met is our beloved art barn, and the Guggenheim is a gas; but MOMA imprinted us like baby ducks not only with what we know of modern art and design but with how we think of them.

Not enough can be said in praise of the mounting of the painting and sculpture collection, from Cézanne to Johns; and the same goes for the drawing and photography galleries. Canonical quibbles aside—but hardly suppressed, since they constitute an unending debate on the meanings of the twentieth century—the lavish representations of the giants (eighty-two Picassos, fifty-two Matisses, twelve Brancusis, sixteen Mondrians), challenged by best-case examples of less dominant artists, deliver an education in bliss. The museum's comprehension of modernity was born in the pedagogical mind of Alfred H. Barr, whose heroic early collecting for the museum (when major works came cheap) hewed to a famous flowchart that he made of influential and influenced artists and movements. Barr's schema endured a phase of tendentious pedantry under William S. Rubin and, thereafter, a compensatory spell of revisionist tweakings by Kirk Varnedoe. Summarized by the painstaking current chief curator of painting and sculpture, John Elderfield, the distilled decisions of generations of thinkers and connoisseurs assume confident, full flesh. How sorely have we missed seeing MOMA's collection? Our recent conversation about modern art has relied on books and fading memories. It will now revive in the coin of immediate experience. First up on the critical agenda is whether MOMA should even bother with art since the nineteen-sixties, the assessment of which stumbles badly in the museum's inadequate account of minimalism and its amazingly haphazard contingent of Pop artists (R. B. Kitaj? Romare Bearden?). Andy Warhol's breathtaking 1962 "Gold Marilyn" may be the last work in the building that makes dramatic sense in terms of a Barr-esque, historical march of styles—a concept of time now as honorably obsolete as Renaissance one-point perspective is for imagining space.

The building's one exciting, though fleeting, eccentricity occupies the top floor: a cavernous, H-shaped space that evokes something between a gymnasium and a union hall. It has that socialist air, often encountered in Europe, of forbiddingly cold amenities for the masses, minus the scuff marks. Meanwhile, as a conspicuous consumption of midtown square footage, the room trumpets the prerogatives of imperial patronage on a par with Versailles. It will be chopped up to house temporary exhibitions. At present, it comes in handy for parking two wonderful, vast works: Ellsworth Kelly's 1957 "Sculpture for a Large Wall" and James Rosenquist's 1964-65 "F-111." (The latter improves each time it is seen, as a decoction of the cultural energies of the sixties caught at their peak moment.) Seen practically bare, the pristine canyon proffers an existentialist blank check to the future, perfectly expressing the terminal state of modern idealism: rich and powerful, clean out of ideas, an uncertain but dazzling light onto the world. ♦

POP MUSIC

FIFTH GRADE

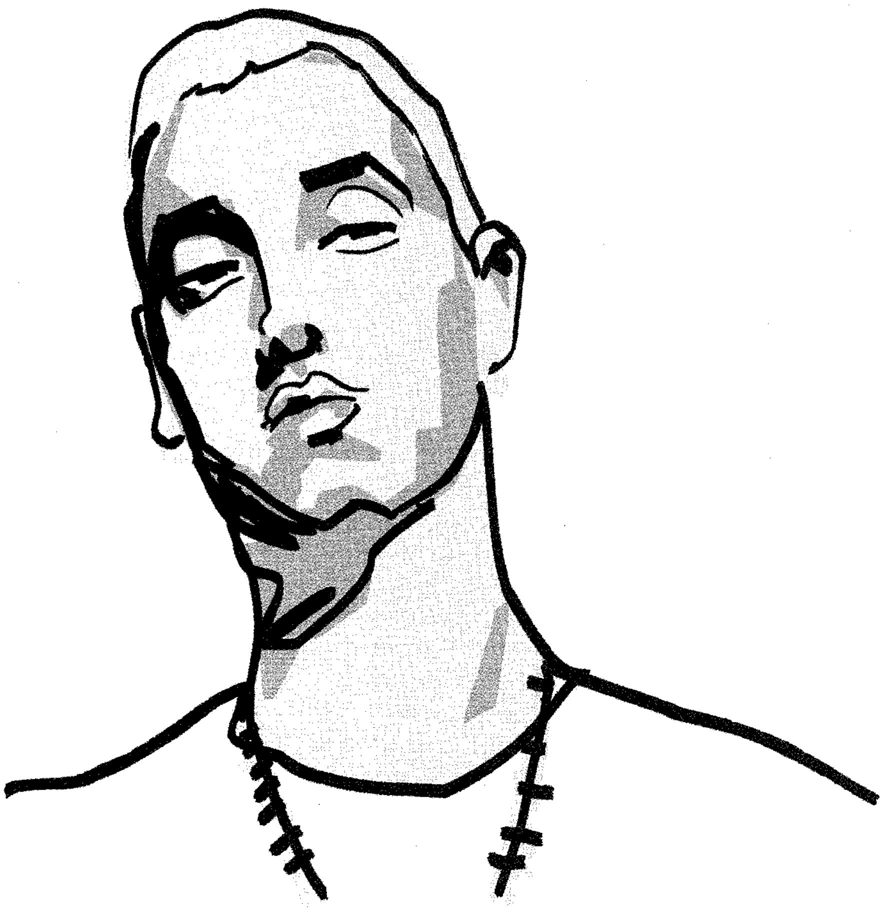
Eminem's growing pains.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

For people under thirty, Eminem may be the most significant recording artist in the English-speaking world. His previous album, "The Eminem Show," sold eight million copies in a little under a year. (The Beastie Boys' "Licensed to Ill," an equally politically incorrect though vastly superior record by equally white rappers, took twelve years to sell that many copies.) Eminem's new album, "Encore," has sold more than a million and a half copies in less than two weeks. And, terminally unpleasant or not, Eminem is occasionally astonishing, able to upend expectations and redeem his many tedious attempts to *épater* all of us.

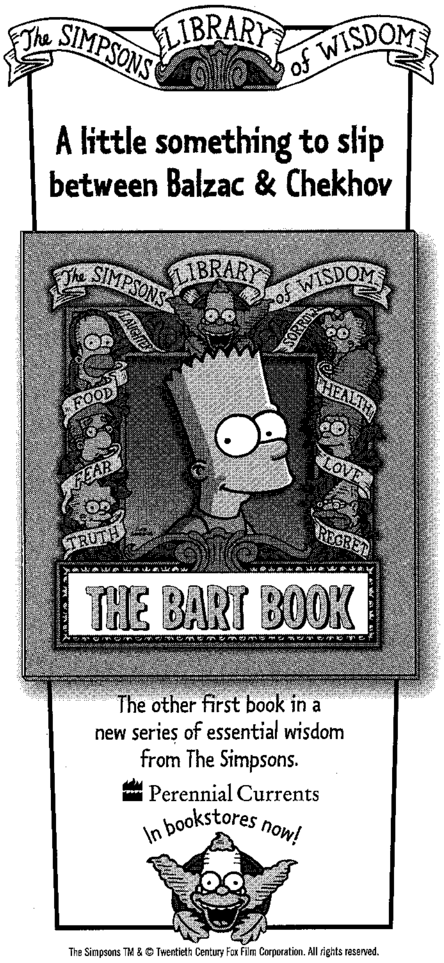
Perhaps aware that shock inevitably produces its own tedium, Eminem talks in the current issue of *Rolling Stone* about his eight-year-old daughter, Hailie, and the difficulty of co-parenting her with his ex-wife, Kim Mathers, who has attempted suicide and was jailed earlier this year for drug possession. The article includes a discussion of Eminem's new sense of maturity.

Little of this offstage thoughtfulness can be found in "Encore" 's seventy-seven minutes of superstar petulance, bathroom jokes, misogynism, and simple lazy-assedness. Because Eminem's songs are rooted in adolescent anger and its paper-thin rationalizations, they must deliver big to



"Encore" fails to distract us from Eminem's bottomless ability to feel sorry for himself.

JEROEN KOOLHAAS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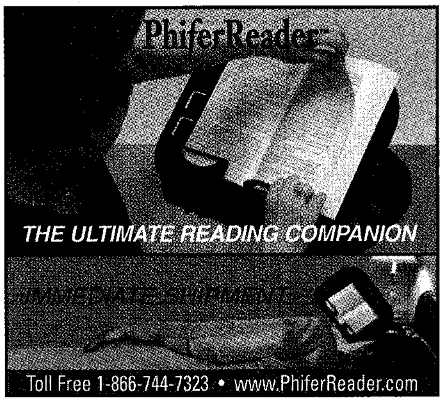
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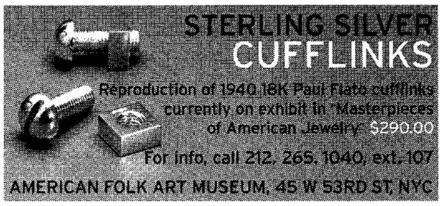
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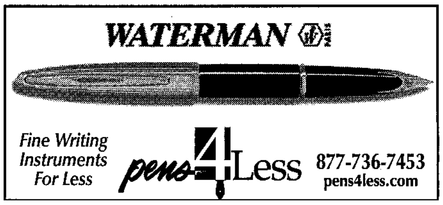
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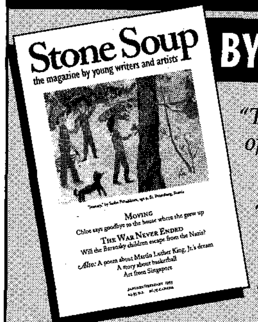

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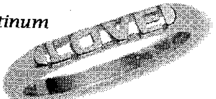

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justify an essentially annoying world view, either with aesthetic fireworks or with a performance convincing enough to distract us from the artist's bottomless ability to feel sorry for himself. He has done it in the past with "Lose Yourself" and "Stan," close-to-perfect songs that help explain his critical lionization.

One of Eminem's best songs was his 1997 début single, "My Name Is," produced by his mentor and sponsor, Dr. Dre. The electric-piano sample is deceptively cheerful, just the right camouflage for an unknown white rapper from Detroit gleefully tipping over sacred cows in this confident, deadpan whine. Why did he want to impregnate pop stars and hang himself and insult his mother? At first, we didn't need to know. His rhymes were organic pieces of a perfectly pitched, if amoral, comedy. Eminem was smart enough to smile when complaining, a balance some songwriters never learn. For instance, when he was discussing the challenges of new fame, on 1999's "The Real Slim Shady," the beats and the words collided in a happily constrained way, like marbles being shaken in a jar. He had developed his own style, creating unusually long concatenations by inserting different words into the same rhythmic pattern over and over. (In the wrong hands, this method mimics a child's repetitive "Mom? Mom? Mom?") When Eminem's rhymes click, they feel both musically calibrated and lexically tuned, the careful work of someone who loves language and has crumpled up a lot of paper trying to figure out how, and where, words fit together.

But on "The Eminem Show," his third major-label album, Eminem's scansion was being squashed by his personality. No longer the underdog, he sounded like Al Pacino in "Scarface," paranoid and entitled. The humor had curdled. Eminem no longer wanted to hang himself; it was you and everyone else he was after. The beats became slow and flat, losing syncopation as the air left the room.

On "Encore," his fourth album, the rhythms have hardened into a martial clomp that leaves plenty of room for Eminem's voice but does little to help him. There's a lack of suppleness in the backing music, and that's a problem if your approach to rhyming is "and and and." His current take on "themes" doesn't help, either. "Ass Like That" is one of many icky songs, a train wreck of failed sketch comedy. Eminem raps in what may be a South Asian accent, or possibly an imitation of Triumph the Insult Comic Dog. There is a chance that he is simply making fun of non-Americans who get pulled over by the police. Before any of this becomes clear, or funny, we get an illogical chorus about impressive butts and a sitar phrase tied to a fifth-grade discussion of erections. The whole album is filled with this kind of thing. Listening to it is like being hit in the arm by someone's little brother forty-five times in a row.

"My First Single," one of the few vigorous songs on the record, falls on Eminem's plastic sword. "This was supposed to be my first single but I just fucked that up, so," goes the chorus, interrupted every few seconds by very convincing bathroom noises. The verses are a patchwork of strategies that he's worn down to the nub—disguising homoeroticism as homophobia, savaging people who don't like his lyrics, spitting out a list of pop-culture names like Paris Hilton and Britney Spears. By the end of the song, Eminem doesn't seem to remember what he's rapping about.

When he can't find anyone new to attack, Eminem reaches for his two longest-running characters: an evil, drug-taking mother named Debbie and a crazy, hostile ex-wife named Kim. On prior records, he raped and killed his mother, killed his ex-wife twice, and served both of them enough abuse that fans can sing along with Eminem's hatred. We get more this time: "Crazy in Love" extends Eminem's bilious assault on both mother and wife, "Puke" focusses solely on Kim, and "Evil Deeds" furthers his humiliation of Debbie Mathers, his mother, by apologizing to his absent birth father, who, on previous records, was just another enemy. Like many of Eminem's other targets, Debbie and Kim Mathers are in no position to fight back. They are helpless people with the same names as the characters Eminem has created, vessels for his permanent anger. They don't put out records, don't appear on MTV, don't get interviewed. Not much of a fight.

So we have to ask: Slim? Marshall?

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Eminem? You're thirty-two, and you talk in interviews about how hard it is for your daughter to see her mother in jail. And, thanks to "8 Mile," we know about the trailer home and the rough early life. Wasn't Debbie Mathers going through all that, too? You've killed and rekilled the women around you—hasn't catharsis kicked in? Couldn't someone with your talent for role-playing maybe change things up and write a song from their perspective?

One song makes "Encore" and Eminem hard to dismiss. Less than two weeks before the election, Eminem released the video to "Mosh," another track from the album. Most people heard it first by seeing the animated video on the Internet. Hours after it was released, I was receiving e-mails and calls from people asking if I'd seen it. More than one person was on the verge of tears.

The same guy who made his "pee pee go da doing doing doing" produced a sombre but furious jeremiad against President Bush. At last: Eminem was behaving like the badass he'd always claimed to be, taking on somebody his own size in plain view of the Patriot Act. Whatever lip service other musicians have paid to the idea of protest this year, nobody else this popular released a song this angry. A long, gloomy modal melody arcs over the rhymes. The beats are so slow that they tense up rather than deflating. The cartoon people in the video—soldiers, wives left at home—march behind Eminem and his rage: "Strap him with an AK-47 / Let him go fight his own war let him impress daddy that way / No more blood for oil, we got our own battles to fight on our own soil / No more psychological warfare to trick us to thinking that we ain't loyal." The video ended with a supertitle on a black screen: "Vote November 2nd."

The truth is, Eminem could not survive on righteous fare like "Mosh." It's not his style, and after a few tracks like this he'd probably lose a chunk of his audience. Eminem's mode is the childishly profane, the comically exaggerated—he's more Benny Hill than Lenny Bruce. But on "Encore" he sounds like neither; he's buried too deep inside his own problems to see the audience. It's time for Eminem to look for subjects outside his head. And leave the family alone. ♦

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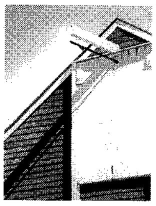

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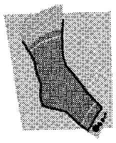

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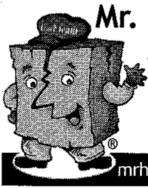

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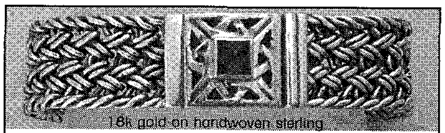

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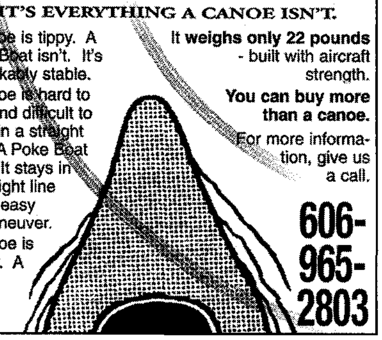

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THE DESTINY OF ME

Dame Edna, Woody Allen, and the selfish gene.

BY JOHN LAHR

Once upon a time in 1955, sitting at the back of a bus carrying an Australian repertory troupe around the province of Victoria, Barry Humphries, an aspiring twenty-one-year-old actor, began to improvise a character called Edna Everage, who was born out of tedium and a dandyish appetite for astonishment. Humphries had dropped out of the University of Melbourne but had already earned a place in antipodean cultural history for his outrageous collegiate escapades. On one occasion, he planted a roast chicken and a split of champagne in a garbage can at a bus stop; dressed as a tramp, he returned to root through the trash until he found his prize, which he ate in front of the startled bus queue. "The only Australian who ever understood the Dada principle of *provocation*," Robert Hughes wrote, in "The Art of Australia," of Humphries and his fierce and gratuitous public acts, which, Hughes went on, "might have pleased Tristan Tzara."

In those days, Edna, who is a clown in women's clothing rather than a drag act, presented herself as a frumpy Melbourne housewife through whom Humphries could release both his disdain for suburban gentility and his desire to shine. Over the generations, she has evolved into a satire on fame: she is, she claims, a "glittering giga-star." Dame Edna is, in fact, an entrepreneur of insolence. "You see me as a neighbor," she says in her newest incarnation, "Back with a Vengeance!" (at the Music Box), making a spectacle of condescension. "Admittedly, a neighbor with a home bigger and nicer than yours."

At the show's opening, Edna descends from the flies perched, like some fuchsia "Floradora" girl, on a behemoth pair of the pink diamanté harlequin eyeglasses that she favors. "After four years of anxiety, you've finally done it, the country has spoken—I'm back on Broadway!" she says. Dame Edna is our Tinker Bell; if we believe in her, she is real. Edna panders to this longing: for instance, in a song about being the only show in town, she sniffs at "La Cage aux Folles" and "Hairspray" because, she sings, she doesn't like men in dresses. Humphries also understands the exhilarating liberation that Dame Edna engineers. We need somebody to say the unsayable, to act out our infantile vindictive wishes, to be never at a loss. Onstage, she creates a sort of contest with the audience in which it is invited to sport with her. It's a battle of wits for which the public is unarmed; Dame Edna is always triumphant. After one gigantic improvised laugh, she brays, "I snatched victory from the jaws of failure, as usual."

"You, you, you," Edna sings. "The show is all about you." In a sense, this is true. The public has paid to see Dame Edna; the joke for Humphries is that the audience—one way or another—spends a lot of time looking at itself. Edna invests every part of the audience with a personality, and draws it into play: those seated in the mezzanine are "the paupers," those in the boxes are the mentally unstable—"These folk haven't got tickets, they've got prescriptions"—and the people in the orchestra are, well, the sitting ducks. As Edna patrols the front of the stage in her custom-made size-11½ shoes, she winkles out the particulars of people in the front rows, who become, over the course of the evening, the cast of characters against whom she flings all her thinly disguised aggression. Take, for instance, Ginger, from North Carolina. "Is that outfit of yours reversible?" Dame Edna asks her. "Try it inside out, Ginger. You have nothing to lose." Dame Edna is a hostile sharpshooter loudly protesting her innocence. "I don't pick on people," she says. "I empower them, I do."

Edna is nothing if not up-to-date. It will come as no surprise to her fans that she now claims a close friendship with President Bush, to whom she's sent the gift of an atlas, and who sometimes calls her at 4 A.M. "I've got the atlas open at the index," he tells her in one early-morning

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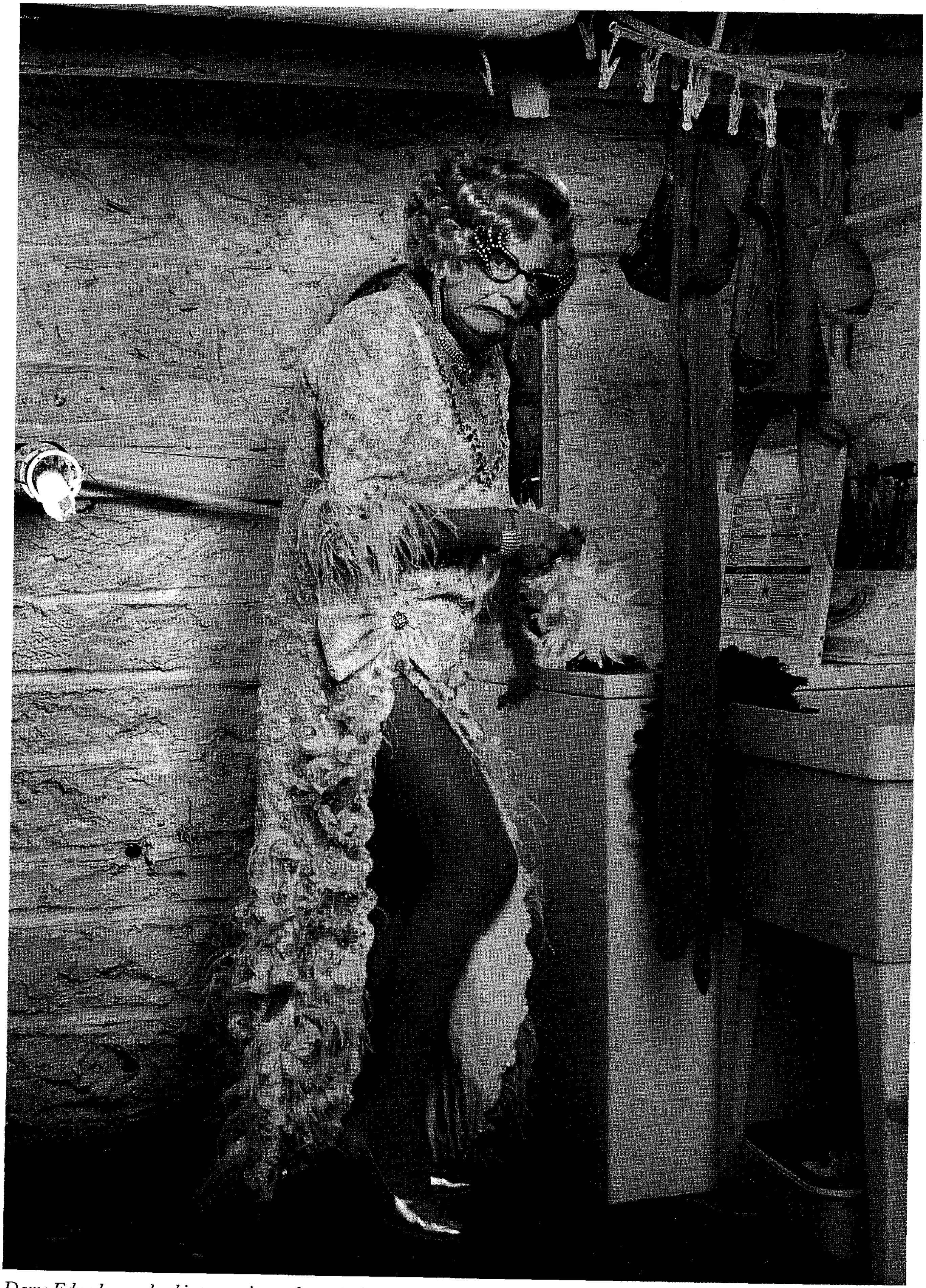
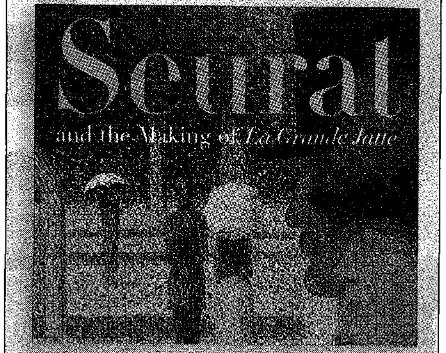


Dame Edna has evolved into a satire on fame: she is, she claims, a "glittering giga-star." Photograph by Martin Schoeller.



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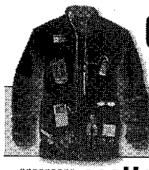

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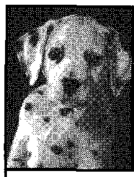

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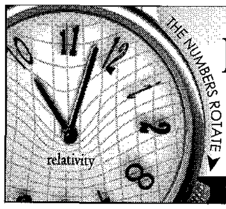

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conversation. "But I can't see Overseas." On the night I saw the show, the "Little President" had just attended the opening of the Clinton library. Dame Edna explained that he was a bit jealous. "He said to me, 'How many books do you need for a library, Edna? Would Laura's copy of "The Da Vinci Code" be enough?' " She added, "But I do not take sides."

In "Back with a Vengeance!," Dame Edna improves on a gag from a previous edition and shows off her spooky intuitive juices by dabbling in "Pedomancy," in which she reads shoes. Using her "shoe retrieval system"—a long pink-and-purple rod with a net at the end which she handles from the pelvis like a deep-sea-fishing pole—Edna gets audience members she's identified to toss in a shoe, then pulls the haul up onstage. "Femininity has run amok tonight," she says, inspecting her catch. She isn't as visually or verbally daring here as she's capable of being—she's on Broadway, after all—but she still has wonderful phallic fun. Under the weight of the shoes, the pole bends obscenely, and she scolds us for our filthy minds. Later, in her trademark finale, she backhands gladiolus into the audience with terrific force, then gets the audience to stand, "thrust," and "tremble" the flowers. The audience doesn't quite know it's being taken for a tumble; but Dame Edna does. As she sings her farewell (she urges the audience "to grab life by the shaft"), the theatre is a sea of swaying long-stemmed flowers—a phallic spectacle that was underscored on the night I saw it when the flower of an overenthusiastic trembler in the front row snapped in half. "Gladiolus interruptus," Dame Edna said, adding, "Isn't this a sophisticated show!" And, of course, it is—high theatrical art disguised as low comedy. Humphries is now seventy; although comic impudence is hard to sustain into old age—suffering and loss tend to mute the antic—Dame Edna is still capering, still swift, and, like all great clowns, still capable of taking an audience to the frontiers of the marvellous. Her act is really a vaudeville turn, and she has almost single-handedly taken that tradition of glorious frivolity into the twenty-first century. The spectacle is not just exhilarating; it's heroic.

Woody Allen's "A Second Hand Memory" (at the Atlantic Theatre Company) justifies the imperialism of self in a different way. His tale of the deferred dreams of a Brooklyn Jewish family in the nineteen-fifties makes a case for the necessity of selfishness. The drama, which Allen also directs, takes its title from the cobbled recollections of the peripatetic romantic narrator, Alma Wolfe (Elizabeth Marvel), who has been banished from the family and travels the world in search of love and experience. But most of the characters struggle under the weight of other people's desires—obligations that turn out also to be secondhand. When Alma's father's life savings are embezzled, and his jewelry business put in jeopardy, her brother Eddie (Nicky Katt) is called back to Brooklyn from Hollywood, where he's found love and a new life at a talent agency run by his Uncle Phil (Michael McKean). Eddie is the idealized second child of the panic-stricken Lou (the superb Dominic Chianese), who sees him as a savior, and Fay (Beth Fowler), who sees in his happiness the dream she never seized. Eddie returns, leaving behind Phil's secretary, Diane (the fetching Erica Leerhsen), with whom he was smitten. On the rebound, he finds himself married to Bea (Kate Blumberg); he's soon to be a father and to become trapped in a suburban life and a job he doesn't want. His only way out is to borrow money from his uncle, who has his hooks into everything, including Diane. In the end, it's a choice between loss or larceny, between betraying others or oneself. If the survival instinct doesn't exactly trump morality in this tale, at least Allen, true to his amoral and unrelenting comic gene, lets selfishness make a run for it.

Over the past few years, Allen seems to have been writing more defensively than creatively. His stories have felt hasty and lacklustre. Here, happily, he is at work with more penetration. He has taken sufficient time to re-create the hidebound Brooklyn of the fifties. His poetry is not in the language but in the crafty structure, which plays tricks with time. Allen generates a powerful family climate of overbearing terror and regret. If one is looking for Woody Allen in this story, it seems to me, he's not in the characters but in the suffocating family deadliness against which his imaginative life is perpetually pitched. ♦

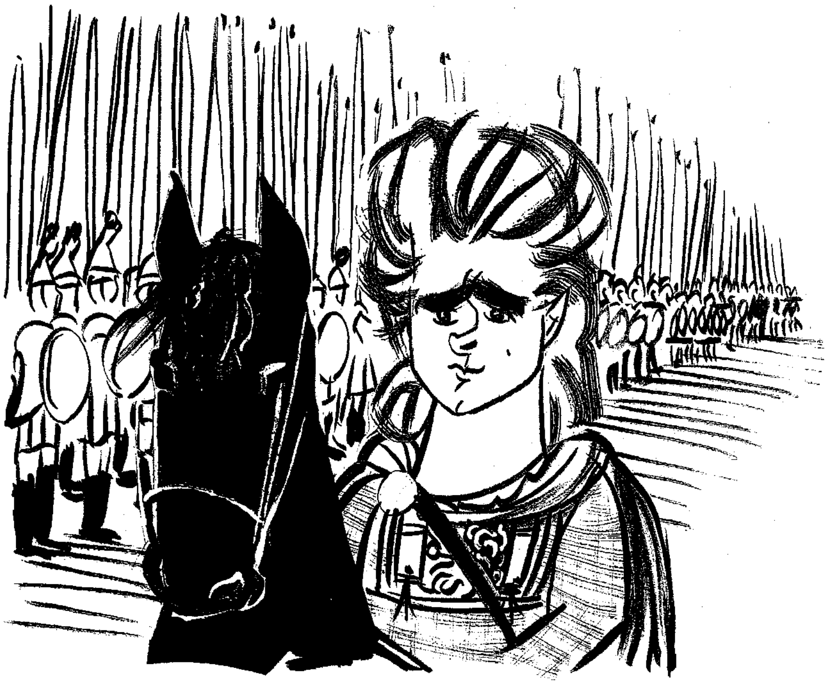
THE CURRENT CINEMA

WAR-TORN

Oliver Stone's "Alexander."

BY ANTHONY LANE

For more than thirty years, the shy, self-effacing Oliver Stone has been nursing fantasies of a film about Alexander the Great, although what attracted him to such a megalomaniac I can't begin to imagine. In the meantime, Stone has been forced to fill his days with sissy little chamber pieces such as "Natural Born Killers," "Born on the Fourth of July," and "Platoon." Now, at last, the hour has come, or, to be specific, the two hours and fifty minutes. That's a long haul, but then Alexander, whose idea of a brisk after-lunch walk was to march a hundred thousand men and their supporting retinue across the Hindu Kush, covered a lot of ground.



Colin Farrell plays Alexander the Great in Oliver Stone's new movie.

TOM BACHTELL

He is played, in "Alexander," by Colin Farrell—and, for the boyhood scenes, by Connor Paolo, who makes a highly plausible mini-Farrell, right down to the Irish accent. Many of the voices in Stone's picture have a serrated Celtic edge to them, which makes a change from the polite, sugar-sprinkled English tones in which most historical dialogue is enunciated. If our hero had been Athenian, such decorum would have been in order, but he and his clan came from Macedonia, to the north, and it was a neat, educated guess on Stone's part to hint at that frontier mentality—one of Alexander's generals remarks, in the heat of conquest, that they are "the grandsons of goatherds"—by branding his characters with a rough tongue.

The telling begins in flashback, with the elderly Ptolemy (Anthony Hopkins), once a companion in arms to Alexander, pottering about his terrace in Alexandria and explaining to a scribe precisely how matchless the man was. This plugging recurs at regular intervals; almost three hours after learning that Alexander was a "colossus" and a "force of nature," we are informed that "his failures towered over other men's successes," and so on. I'm afraid that I resent any movie that incorporates its own P.R. department, especially when there

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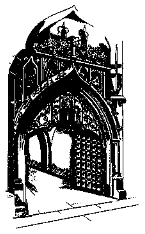

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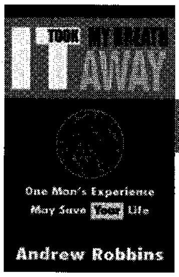

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is no need; if recounted in style, the exploits of Alexander, of all people, should be relied upon to sell themselves.

Alexander, born in 356 B.C., was the son of King Philip II of Macedonia and Olympias, one of his many wives; or, to put the matter in its most startling form, Colin Farrell is the son of Val Kilmer and Angelina Jolie. Wow. Given parentage of that calibre, the boy was never going to be your basic, middle-income Macedonian. Either he was going to conquer nation-states all the way from Athens to India, engraving his name in history, or he was going to wind up running a club called Oedipussy on the wrong end of Mykonos. There is certainly no love lost, in this movie, between Alexander and his father, but the amount of love earned, and wrestled over, between mother and son should have been enough to draw the attention of social services, better known as the god Apollo. Jolie is in her element here, bravely choosing to impersonate a Russian gangster in the delivery of her dialogue, and spending large portions of the film with a snake or two coiled around her person. "Her skin is wet. Her tongue is fire," the Queen says of her favorite pet, although it could be the other way around. We are supposed to read these scenes as evidence of her exotic unknowability and pagan working practices, although, if half of what I hear is true, they resemble a perfectly normal day in the Jolie household.

Alexander, tearing himself away from his adhesive mother, learns how to wrestle, ride, and philosophize, though not all at the same time. His tutor in this last discipline is Aristotle himself—a thankless role for any actor, although Christopher Plummer does a fine job, radiating as much temperate humor as is compatible with wearing an off-the-shoulder bath towel. A pupil asks about male love. "When men live together, and knowledge and passion pass between them, that is pure," Aristotle replies. Now, excuse me, but isn't that pretty close to what eleven states just voted against? If Aristotelian love is a no-no, where does that leave the platonic variety? And why should Jared Leto, in the mascara-tinged part of Alexander's lover Hephaistion, be such an alarming ringer for Kurt Cobain? It seems highly improbable that a film in which very close friends wage war in matching leather miniskirts will find favor in the White House screening room. On the other hand, what a war! Stone, who was in President Bush's class at Yale, uses "Alexander" to offer a strident argument in favor of unilateral aggression against foreign powers, on the ground that—guess what—it's good for 'em. The battle of Gaugamela, in 331 B.C., in which a quarter of a million men, under King Darius III, were put to rout by Alexander with a force of less than fifty thousand, was, in essence, the launch of Operation Persian Freedom.

We are blessed with an eagle-eyed view of Gaugamela—literally so, with the eagle in question scything above the conflict, from one sand-whipped flank to the other. Stone is at his happiest and most frantic here, perhaps even more in the anxious prelude to battle than in the shudder of the actual bloodletting; his shot of the Macedonian spears held high, rattling like reeds in a stiff wind, is rife with the threatening energy that Stone fans have always relished. The strange thing is that, elsewhere, those fans may have cause to feel cheated, or depleted, because there is precious little chance for Stone to practice what he does best: the close combat of riled and raucous souls. James Woods snarling like a Doberman at the wheel of a car, in "Salvador": that is Stone country, not thousands of digitally multiplied Persians, or year upon year of eastward marching into an unpredictable yonder. The epic of a real life may seem dramatically enticing, but, on closer inspection, even a life as replete as Alexander's has a stammering and plotless feel, with violent set pieces dropped into a wilderness of bickering. Is it not smarter and more gratifying to follow the path of "Gladiator," in which a fictional hero, his progress molded to have shape and momentum, can be carefully locked into a landscape of verifiable history?

Stone's picture rises to a climactic, resounding clash in an Indian forest, with Alexander and his men dodging trees as they charge a wall of elephants. Unfortunately, it's not a climax after all. We get a lovely shot of an armed and jewelled elephant rising up on its hind legs, mirrored by a rearing Bucephalus—Alexander's trusted horse, whom he first rode as a boy, and who should surely be living in Florida and playing canasta by now.

The image has a classical dynamic, clanging with memories of the Alexander whom we know from mosaic, relief, and statuary, and the stillness of it is broken by an arrow whistling into his chest. The screen mists over with red, and we brace ourselves for his demise. No such luck. The facts are against us (he succumbed to a fever, possibly induced by poison, in 323 B.C.), and we have another half hour in the dark. "His life should have ended in India," Ptolemy says in rueful voice-over, as if to admit that the movie should have followed suit.

These narrative pitfalls are not unprecedented. They beset Robert Rossen's "Alexander the Great," made in 1956, but that at least had Richard Burton in the title role. Burton's wig appeared to be woven from caramel fudge, but he was blessed with (a) a great first entrance, fresh from the hunt, carrying a dead Macedonian lion over his shoulder, and (b) that voice. When Burton rallied his troops, they stayed rallied, whereas Colin Farrell has no such jolt in his delivery. If Stone wanted a man given to beefed-up rhetoric, he should have hired Cedric the Entertainer. "Alexander" was touted as Farrell's big chance, and it's not really his fault that he blows it. He is a cocky, insidious presence, flashing his eyes and wit to tremendous effect in "Minority Report" and the Irish movie "Intermission," which cost about as much as one Persian breastplate and had twice the fire and spit of "Alexander." Farrell comes across here as twitchy, straw-haired, and buzzing with sexual mystification, as if he had researched the life of Anne Heche by mistake, and he seems bewildered by the film's demands, uncertain whether to opt for a stiff-backed action man—an unironic legend, the sort of role that nobody has been able to master since Charlton Heston retired—or a tortured, more modern spirit, his taste for love dulled by his addiction to fame.

No surprise, maybe, that a film that bows down to a manly myth should be stolen by actresses—first by Angelina Jolie, and then by Rosario Dawson. She plays a provincial princess, sporting a headdress like a deluxe birdcage, whom Alexander, to the bemusement of his generals, marries up in the hills. "Let us go back to Babylon," she suggests. "We'll talk about this later," he replies. Still, the happy couple do enjoy one great scene together, and it's the high point of the movie—a naked tussle, in which she puts a knife to his throat. The whole sequence is quick, funny, and arousing, in sharp contrast to the rest of "Alexander," which is sluggish, unsmiling, and almost as limp as the feather fans with which our heroes are gently aerated on their trip to the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Alexander the Great was never beaten on the field of battle; only in the bedroom, according to Oliver Stone, did he finally meet his match. ♦

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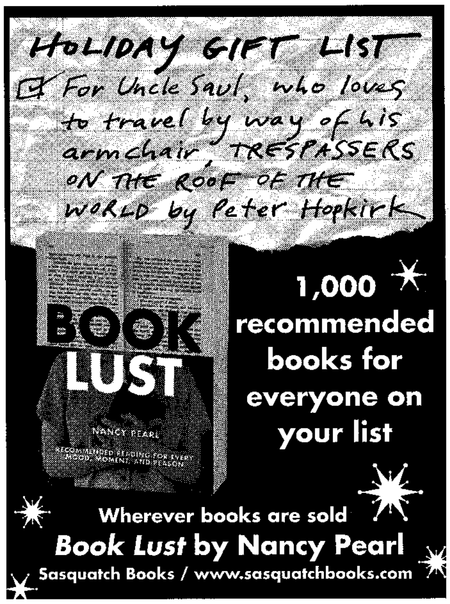
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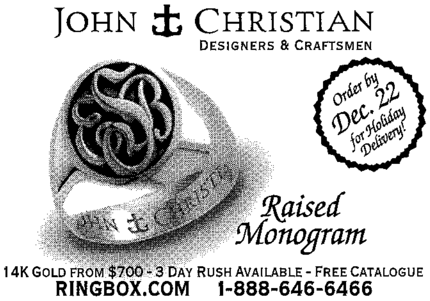
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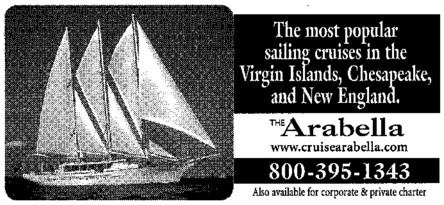
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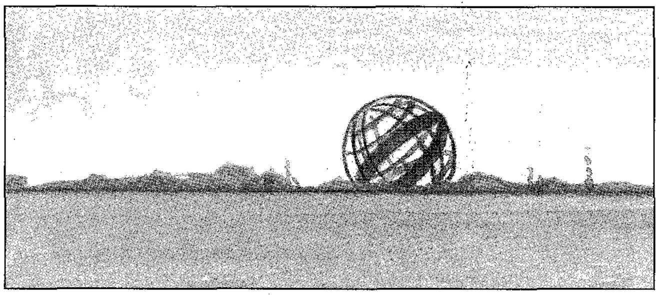

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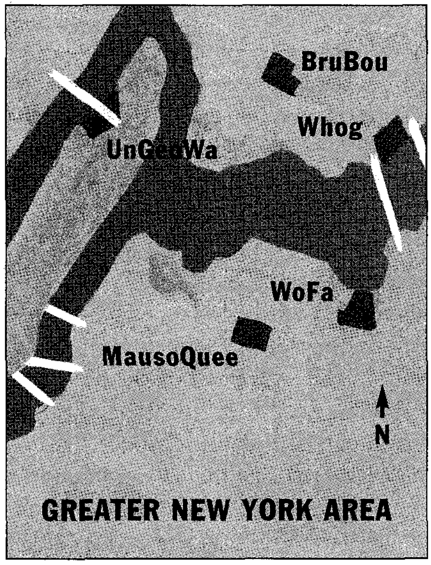

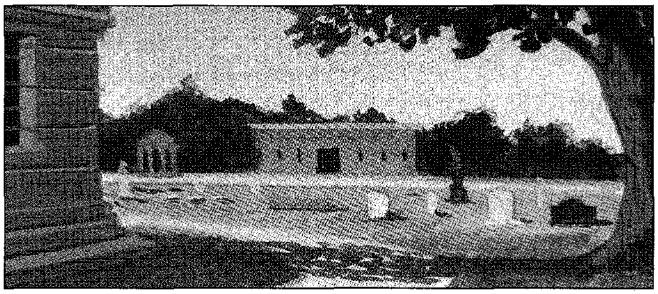

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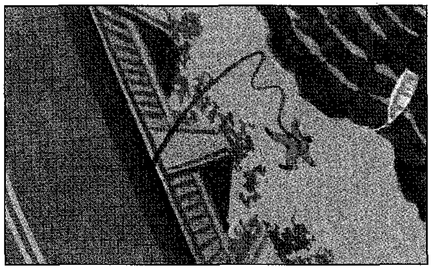

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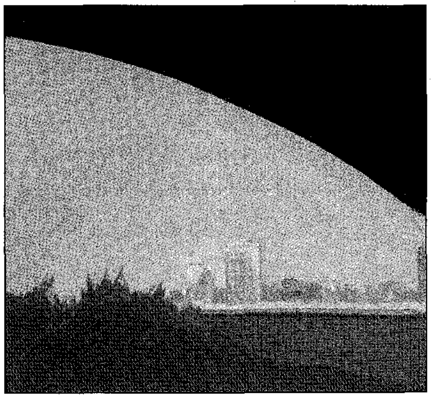

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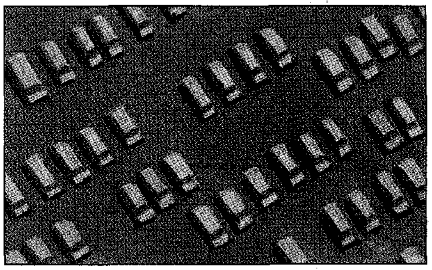

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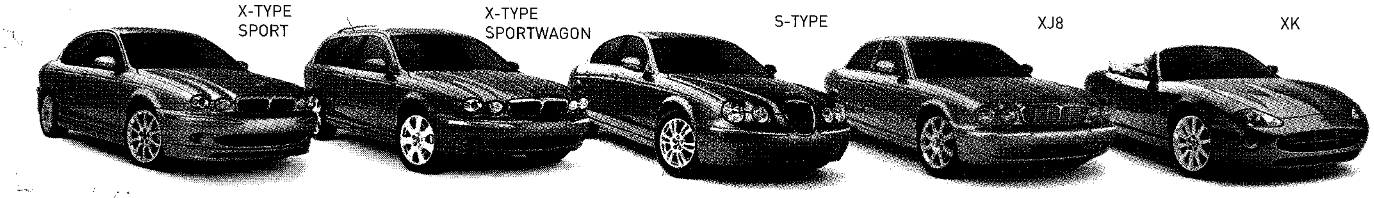

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